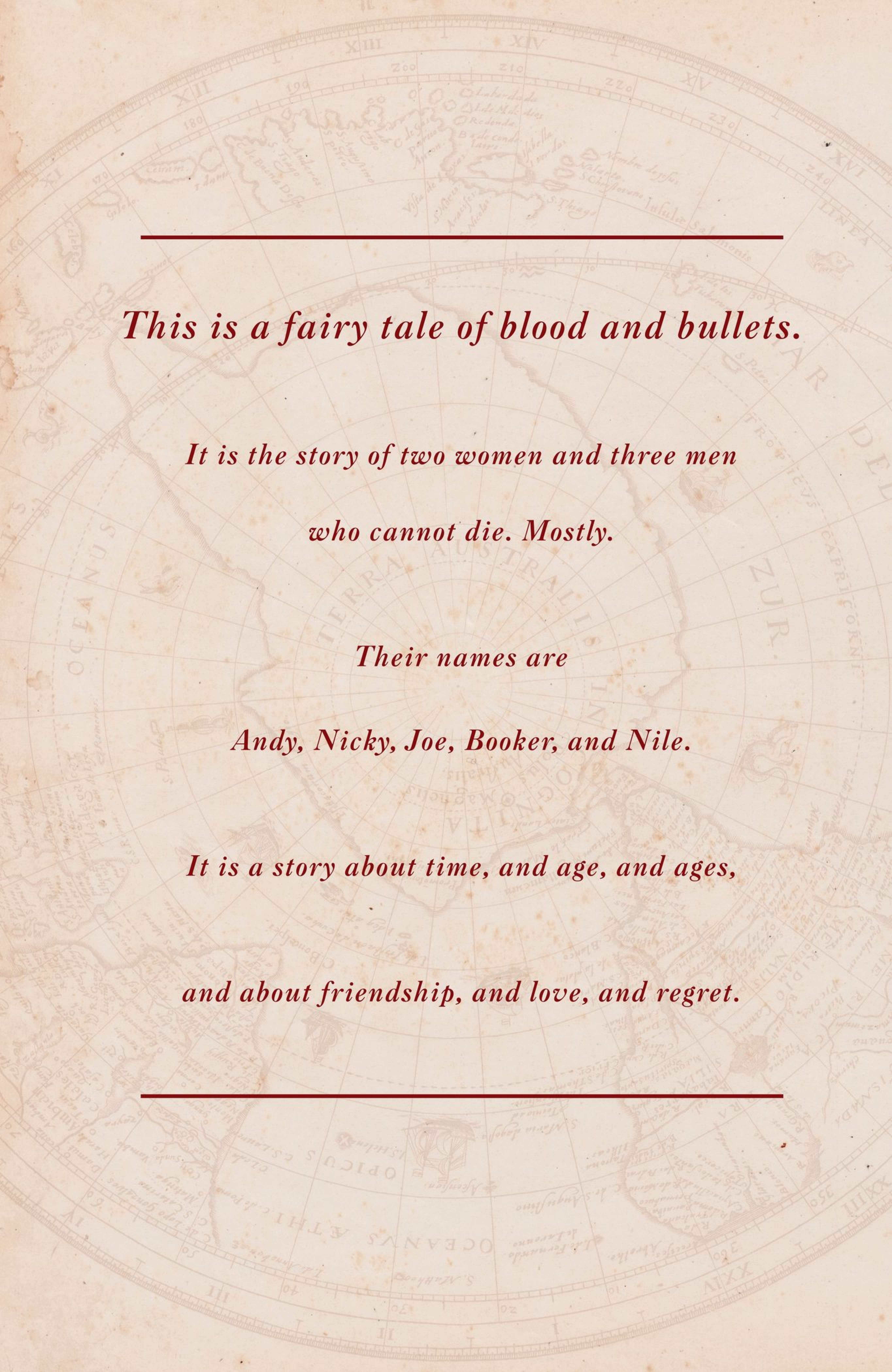
RUCKA · FERNÁNDEZ · MIWA · WYNNE

THE OLD GUARD™

BOOK ONE: OPENING FIRE



This is a fairy tale of blood and bullets.

It is the story of two women and three men

who cannot die. Mostly.

Their names are

Andy, Nicky, Joe, Booker, and Nile.

It is a story about time, and age, and ages,

and about friendship, and love, and regret.

THE OLD GUARD™

BOOK ONE: OPENING FIRE

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THE OLD GUARD, BOOK ONE: OPENING FIRE. First printing. AUGUST 2017.
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Published by Image Comics, Inc. Office of publication: 2701 NW Vaughn St., Ste. 780, Portland, OR 97210.

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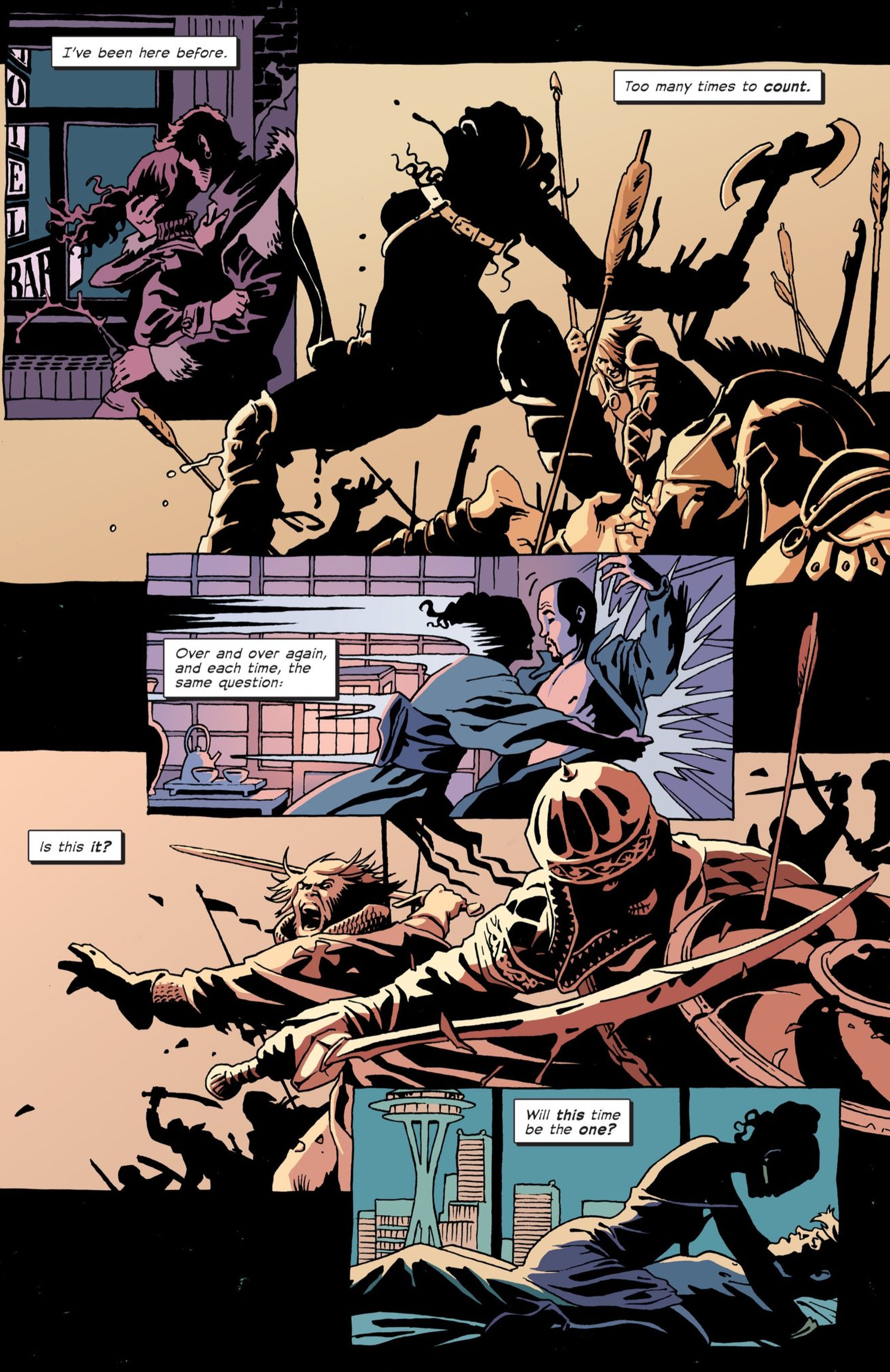
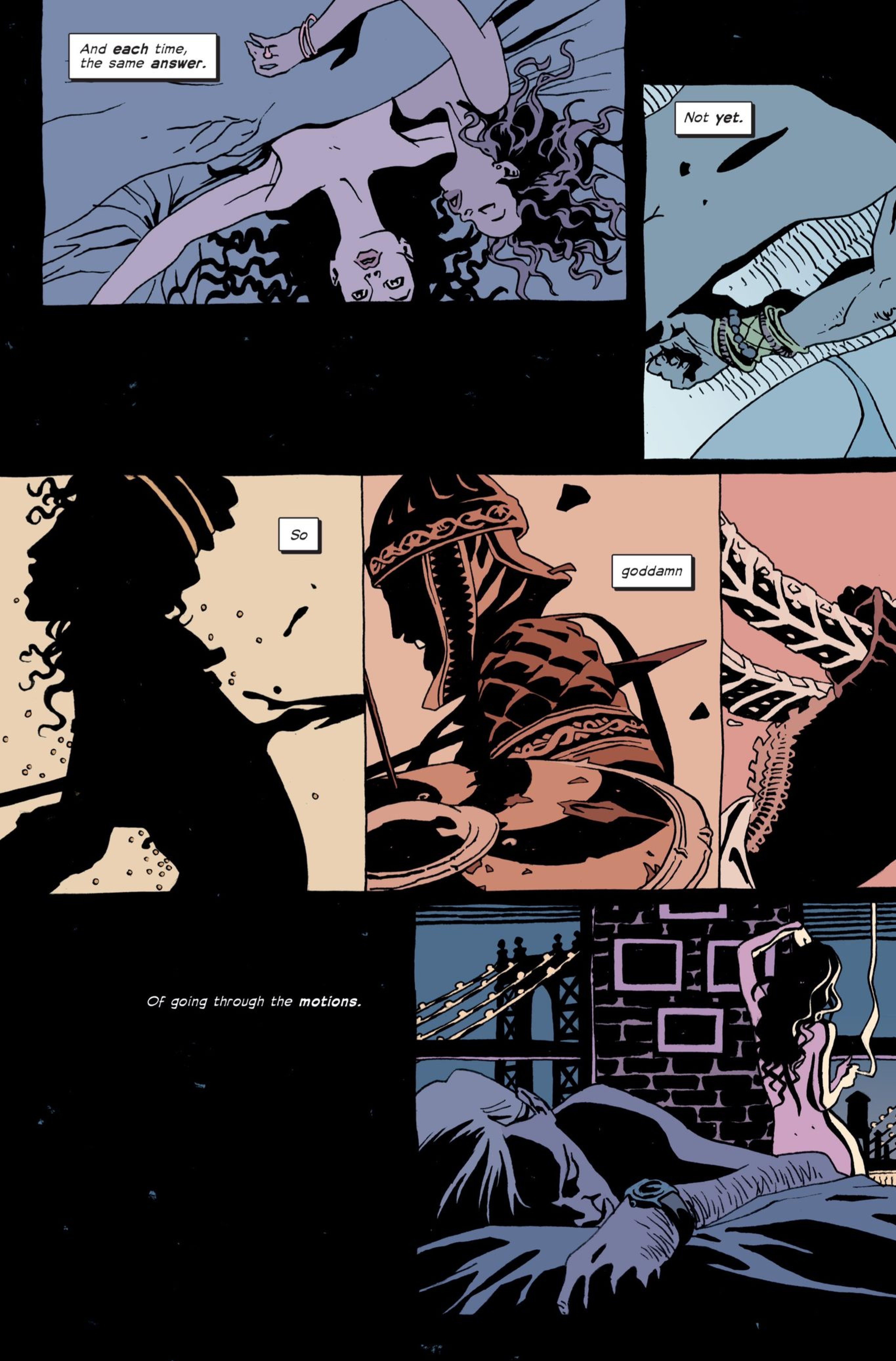
Digital edition.

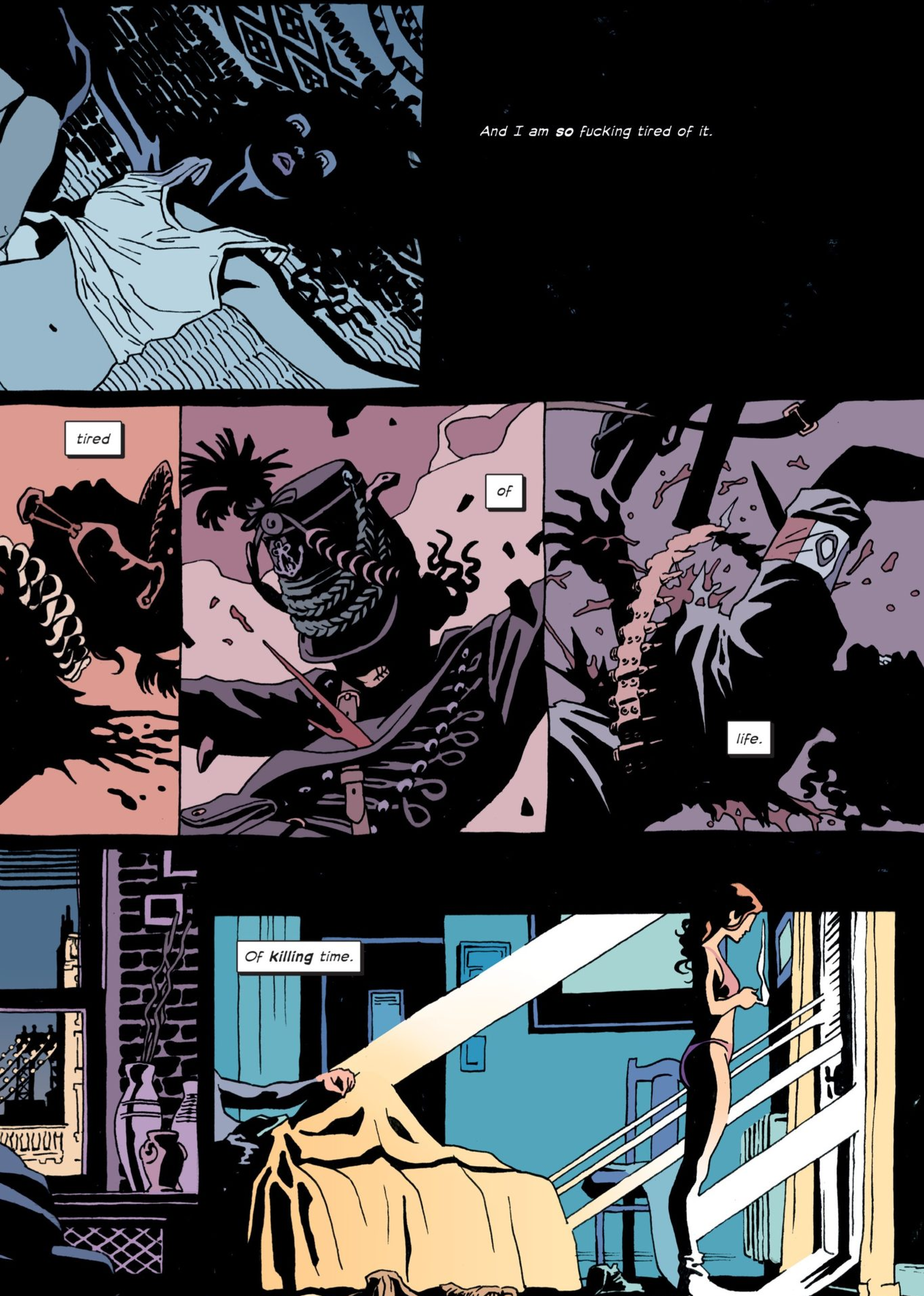
For international rights contact: foreignlicensing@imagecomics.com
ISBN: 978-1-5343-0240-2.
DCBS EXCLUSIVE ISBN: 978-1-5343-0577-9.
NEWBURY EXCLUSIVE ISBN: 978-1-5343-0578-6.
SUB CITY COMICS EXCLUSIVE ISBN: 978-1-5343-0579-3.

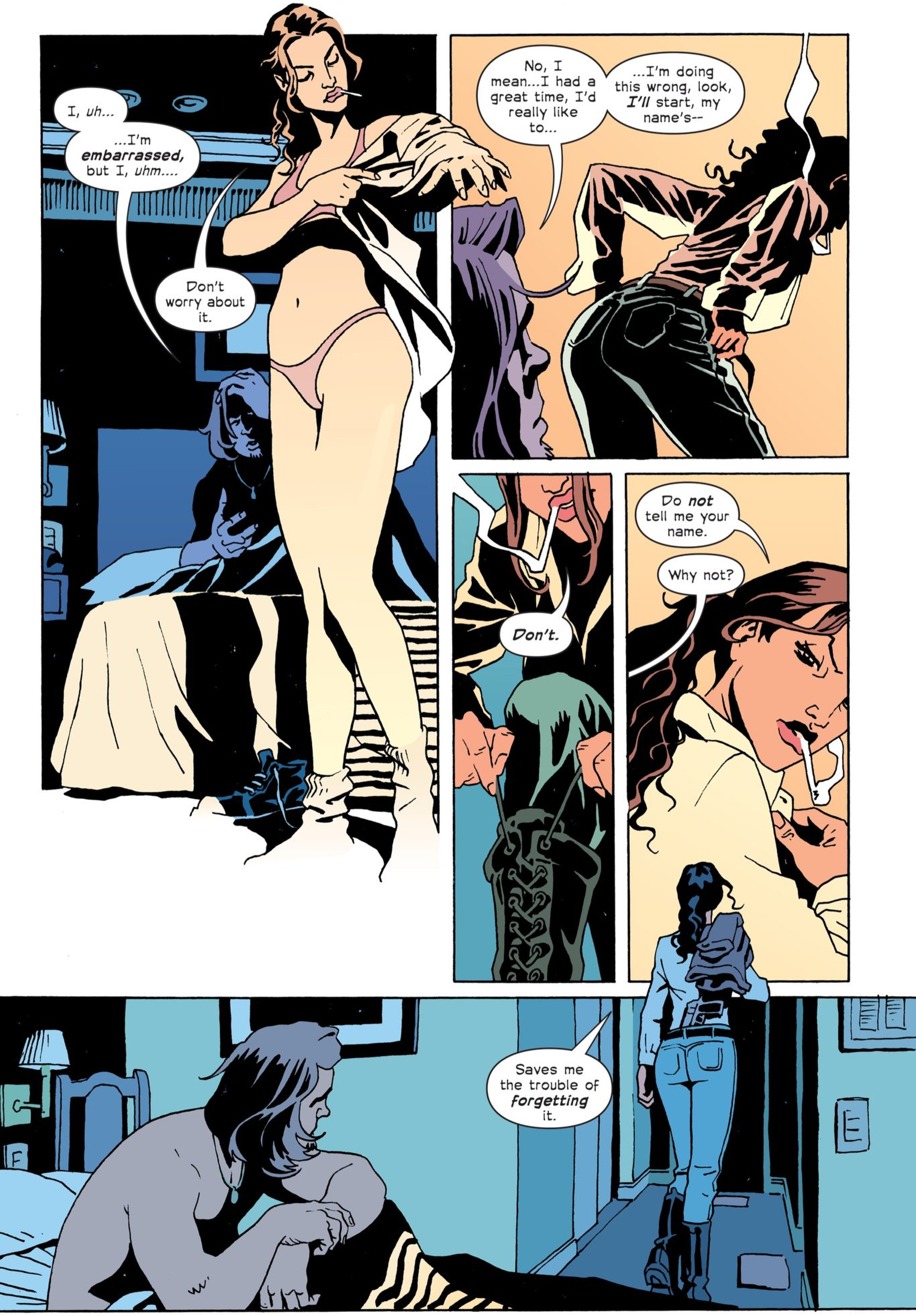
LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ

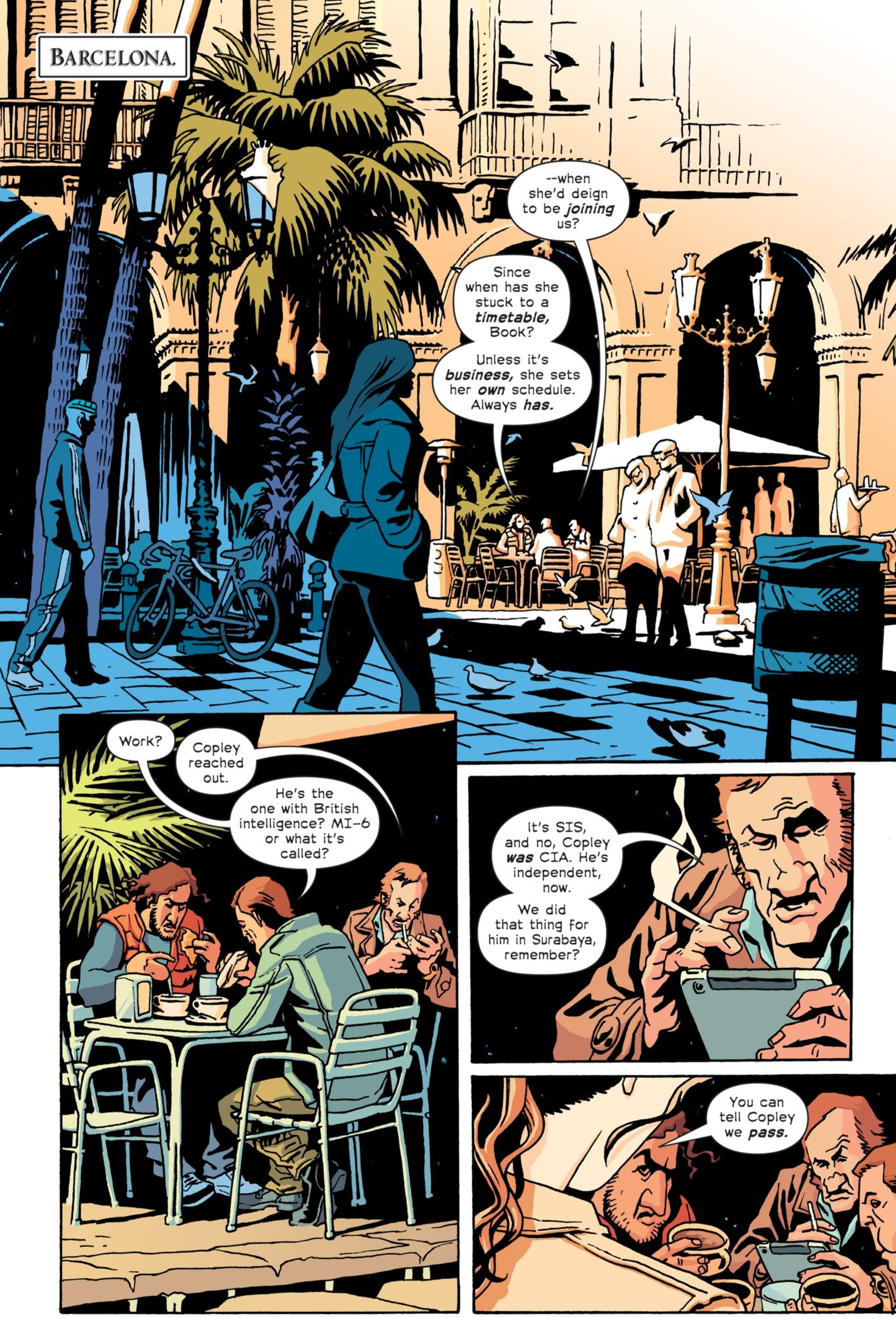
CHAPTER ONE

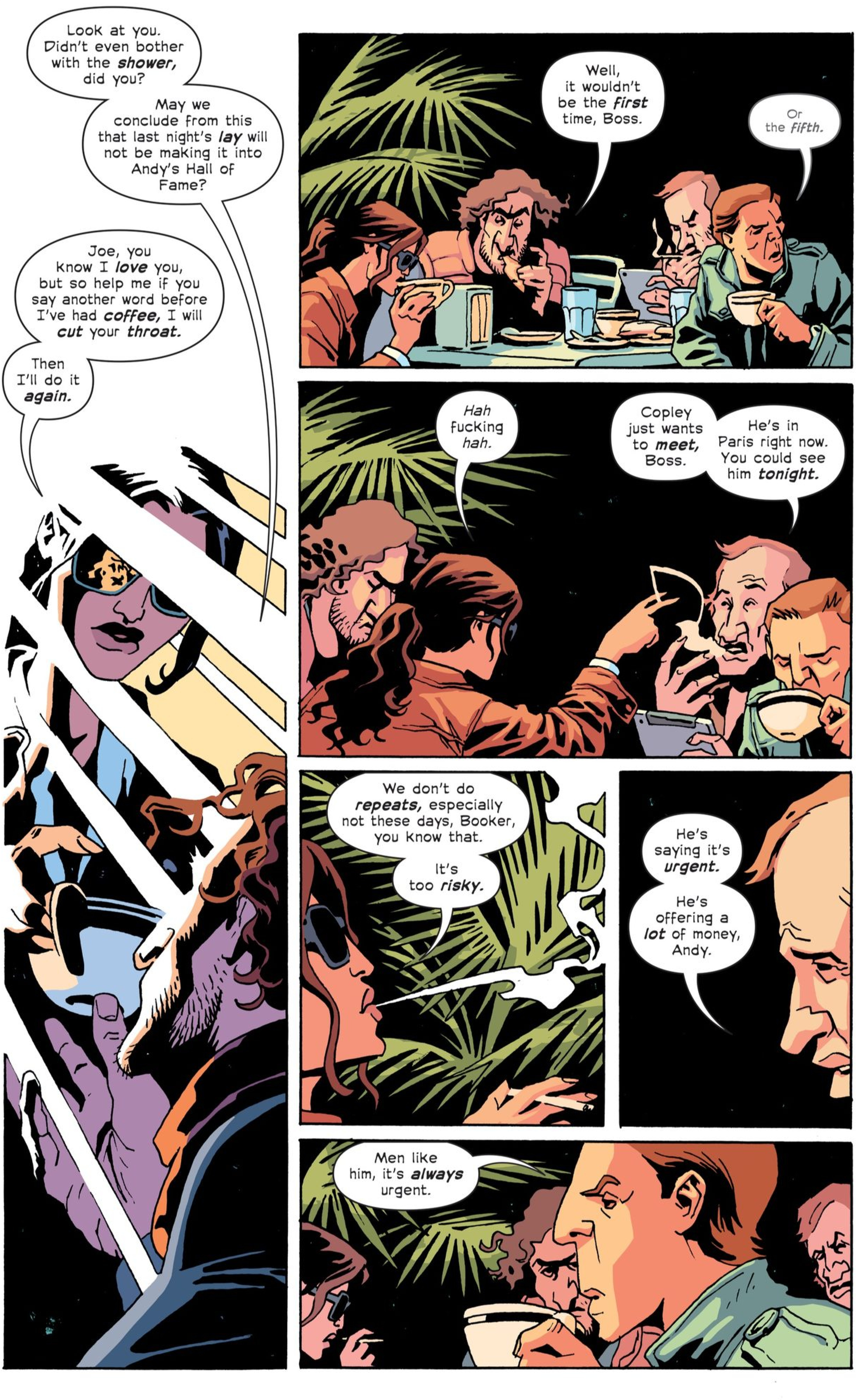

I've been here before.
Too many times to **count.**
OTEL
BAR
Over and over again, and each time, the same question:
Is this **it?**
Will **this** time be the **one?**

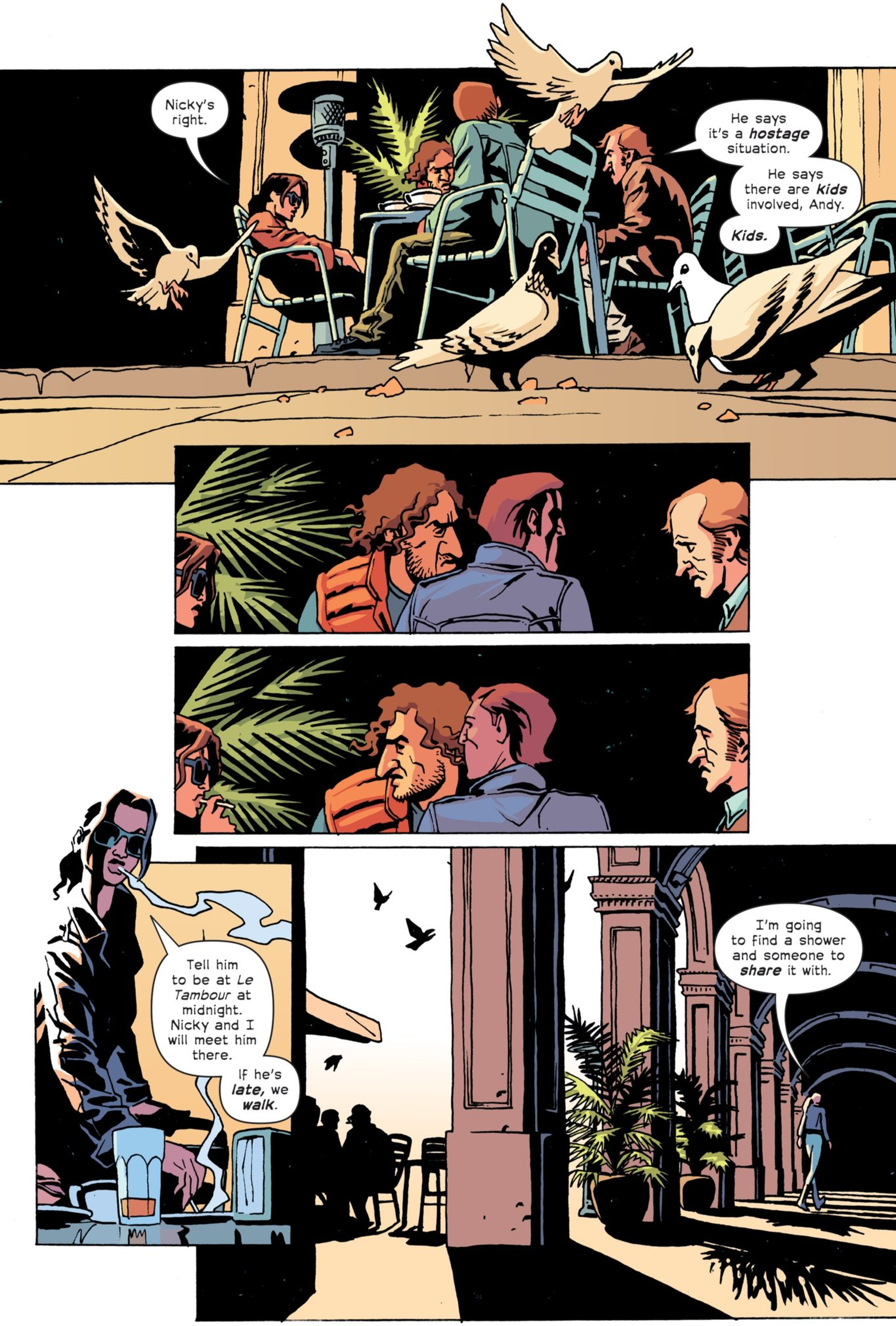

And **each** time, the same **answer.**
Not **yet.**
So
goddamn
Of going through the **motions.**

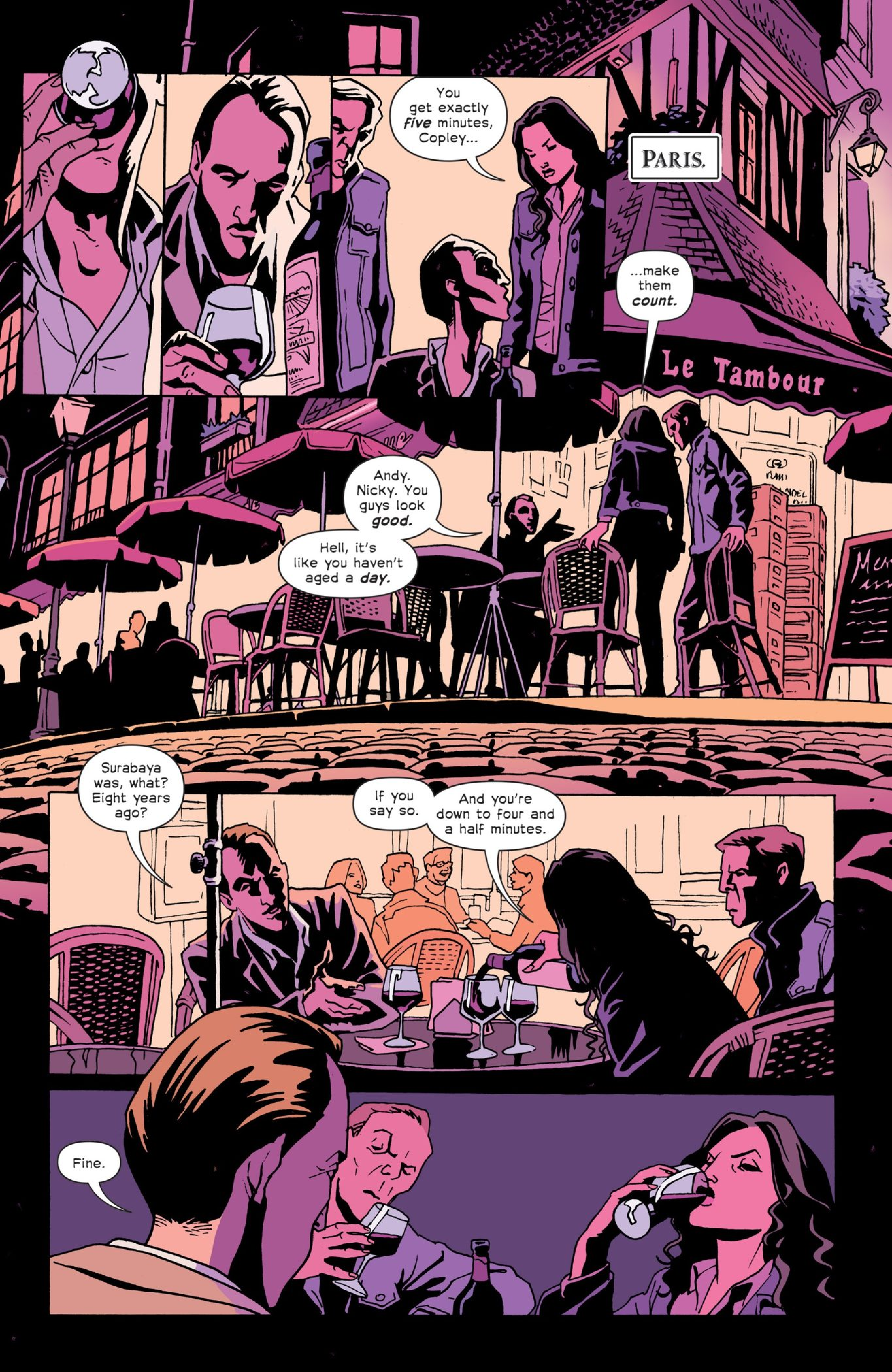

And I am **so** fucking tired of it.
tired
of
life.
Of **killing** time.

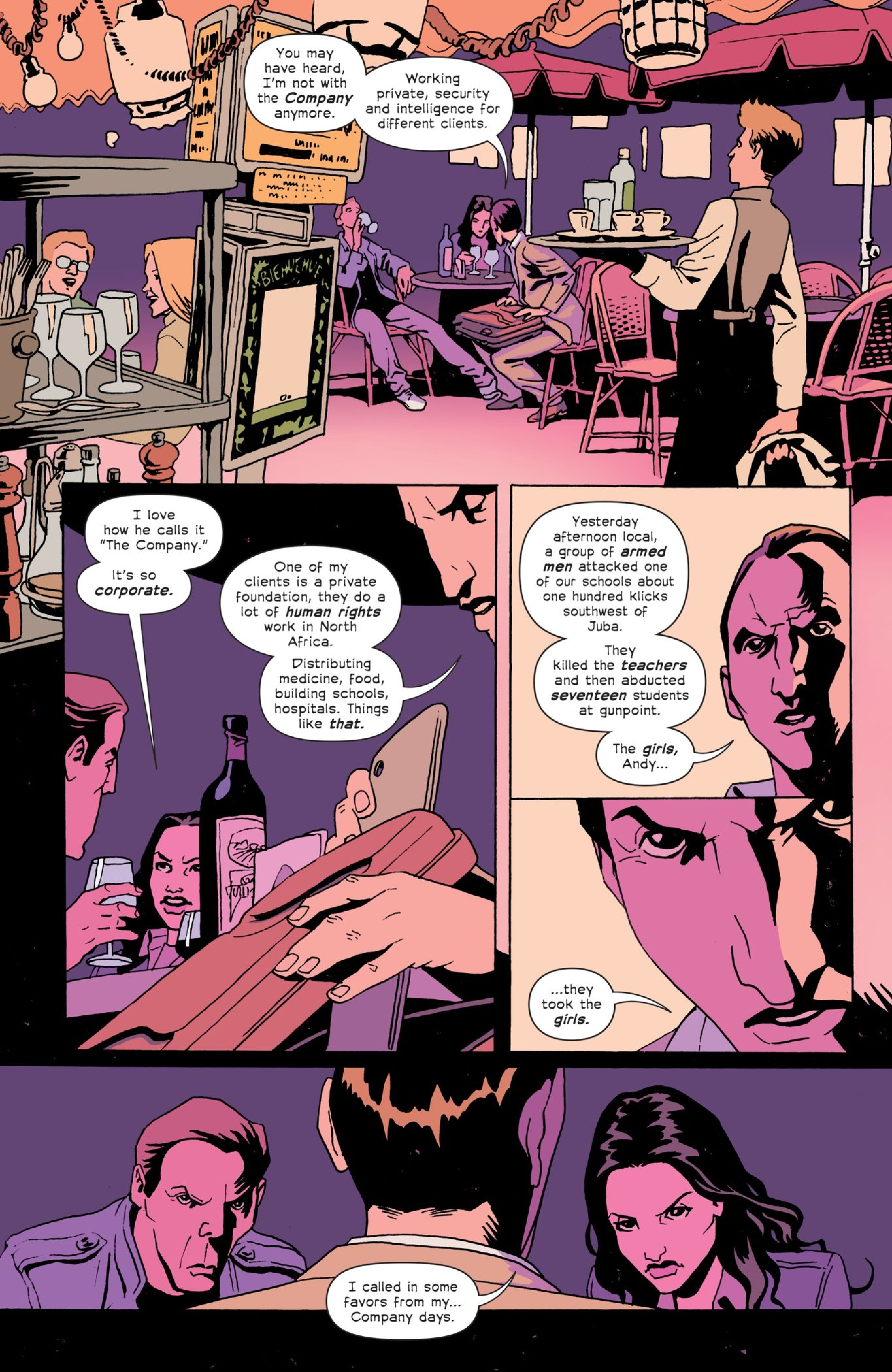

I, *uh*...
...I'm ***embarrassed,*** but I, *uhm*....
Don't worry about it.
No, I mean...I had a great time, I'd really like to...
...I'm doing this wrong, look, ***I'll*** start, my name's--
Don't.
Do ***not*** tell me your name.
Why not?
Saves me the trouble of ***forgetting*** it.

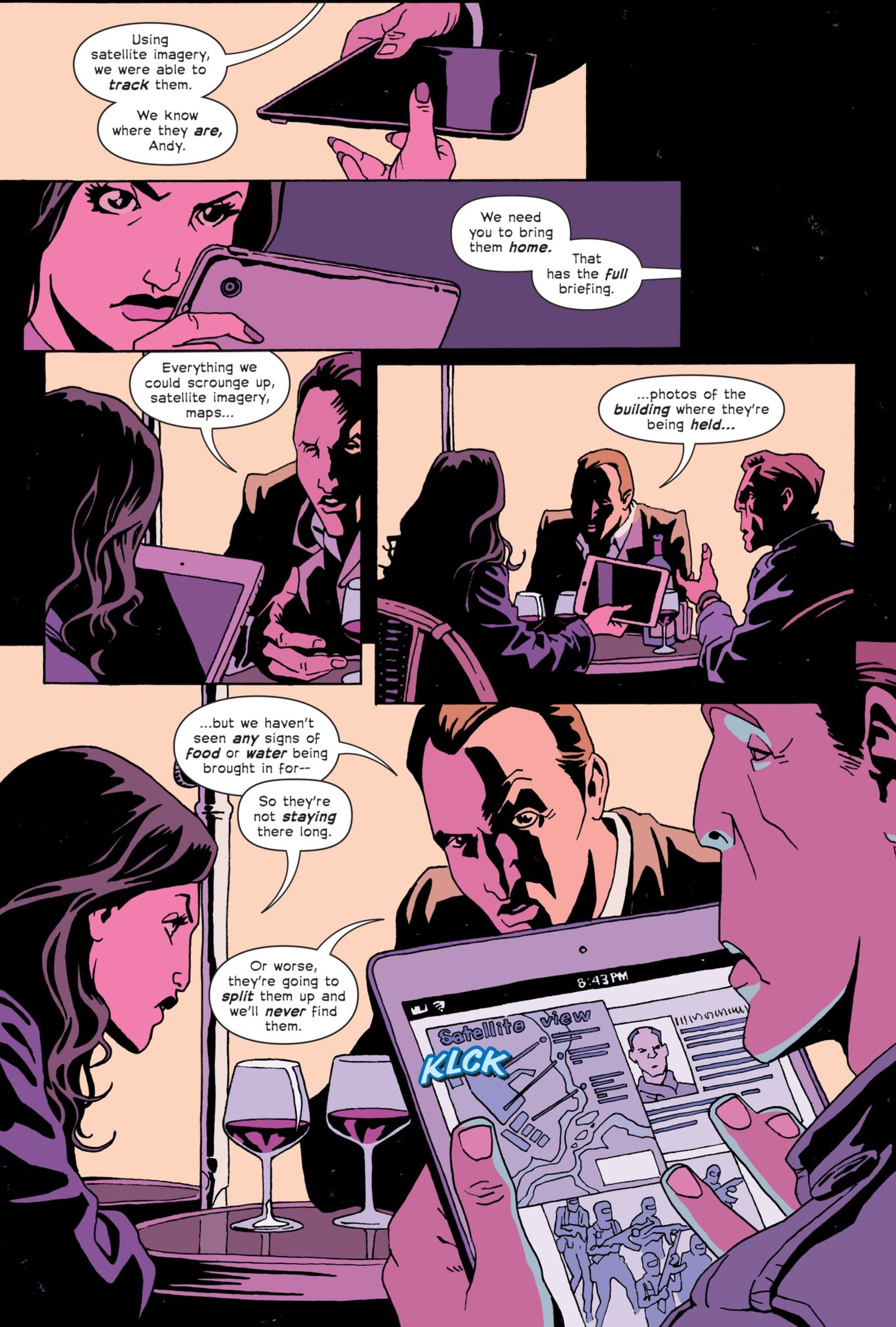

BARCELONA.
--when she'd deign to be *joining* us?
Since when has she stuck to a *timetable,* Book?
Unless it's *business,* she sets her *own* schedule. Always *has.*
Work?
Copley reached out.
He's the one with British intelligence? MI-6 or what it's called?
It's SIS, and no, Copley *was* CIA. He's independent, now.
We did that thing for him in Surabaya, remember?
You can tell Copley we *pass.*

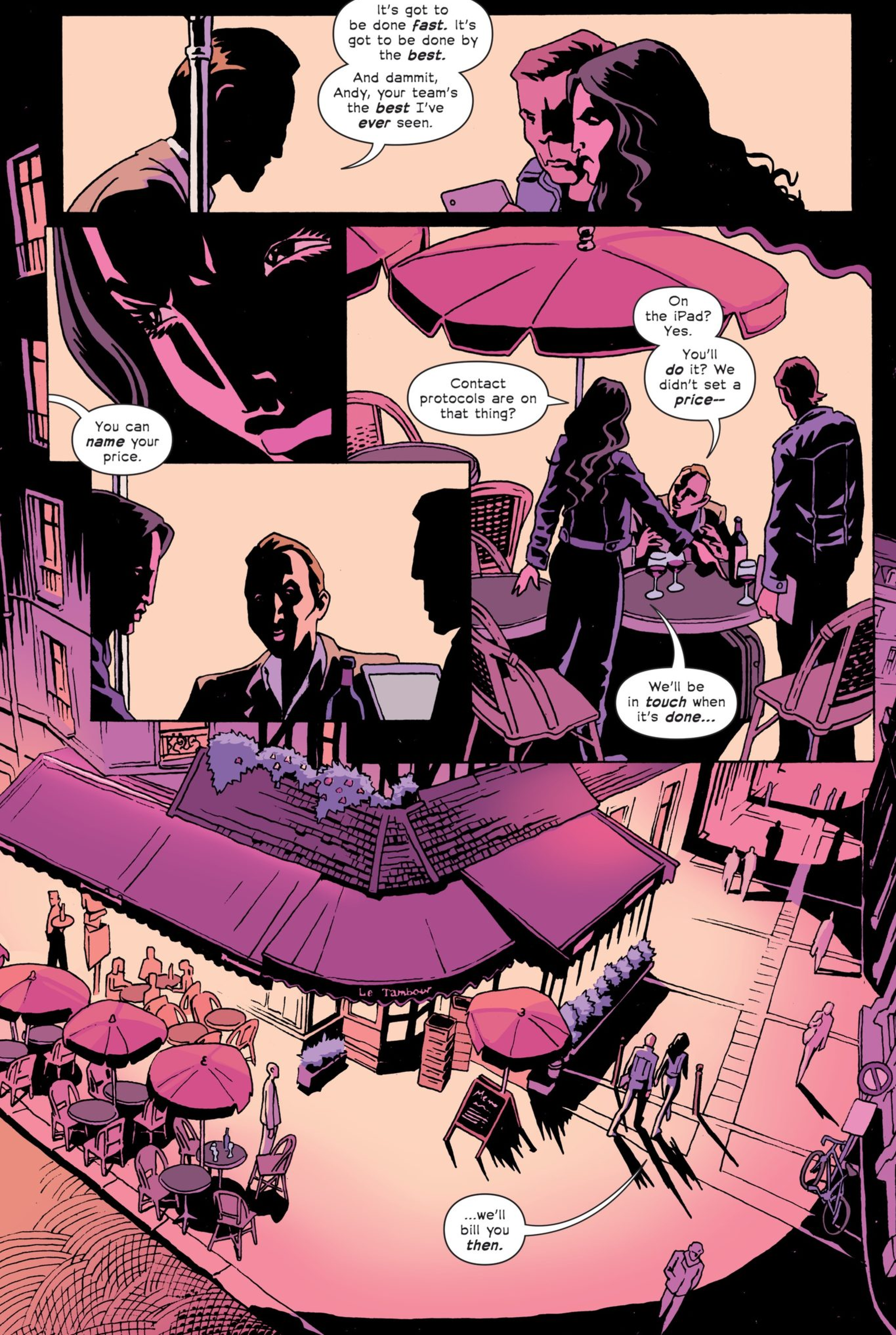

Look at you. Didn't even bother with the *shower,* did you?
May we conclude from this that last night's *lay* will not be making it into Andy's Hall of Fame?
Joe, you know I *love* you, but so help me if you say another word before I've had *coffee,* I will *cut* your *throat.*
Then I'll do it *again.*
Well, it wouldn't be the *first* time, Boss.
Or the *fifth.*
Hah fucking hah.
Copley just wants to *meet,* Boss.
He's in Paris right now. You could see him *tonight.*
We don't do *repeats,* especially not these days, Booker, you know that.
It's too *risky.*
He's saying it's *urgent.*
He's offering a *lot* of money, Andy.
Men like him, it's *always* urgent.

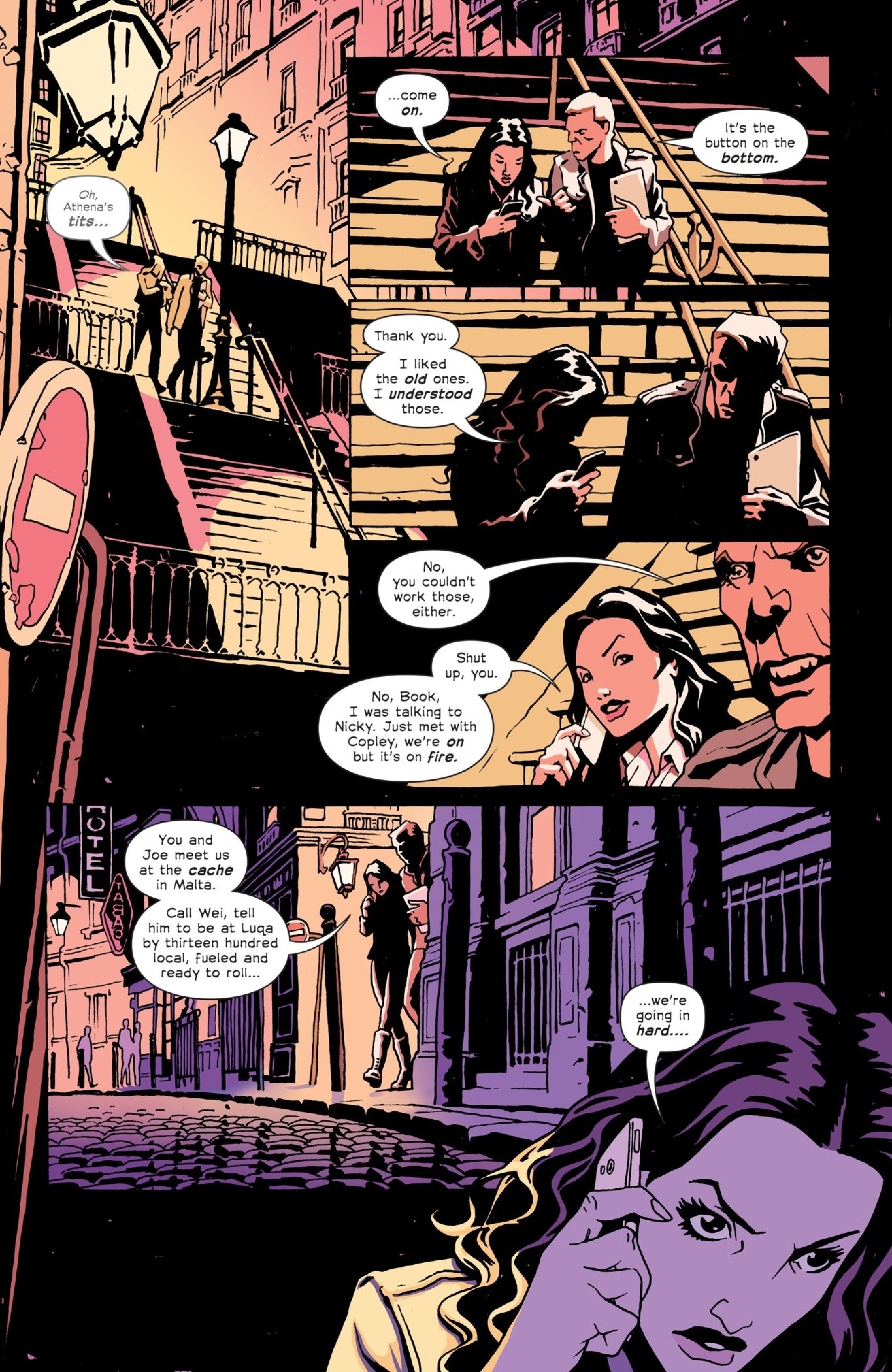

Nicky's right.
He says it's a *hostage* situation.
He says there are *kids* involved, Andy.
Kids.
Tell him to be at *Le Tambour* at midnight. Nicky and I will meet him there.
If he's *late,* we *walk.*
I'm going to find a shower and someone to *share* it with.

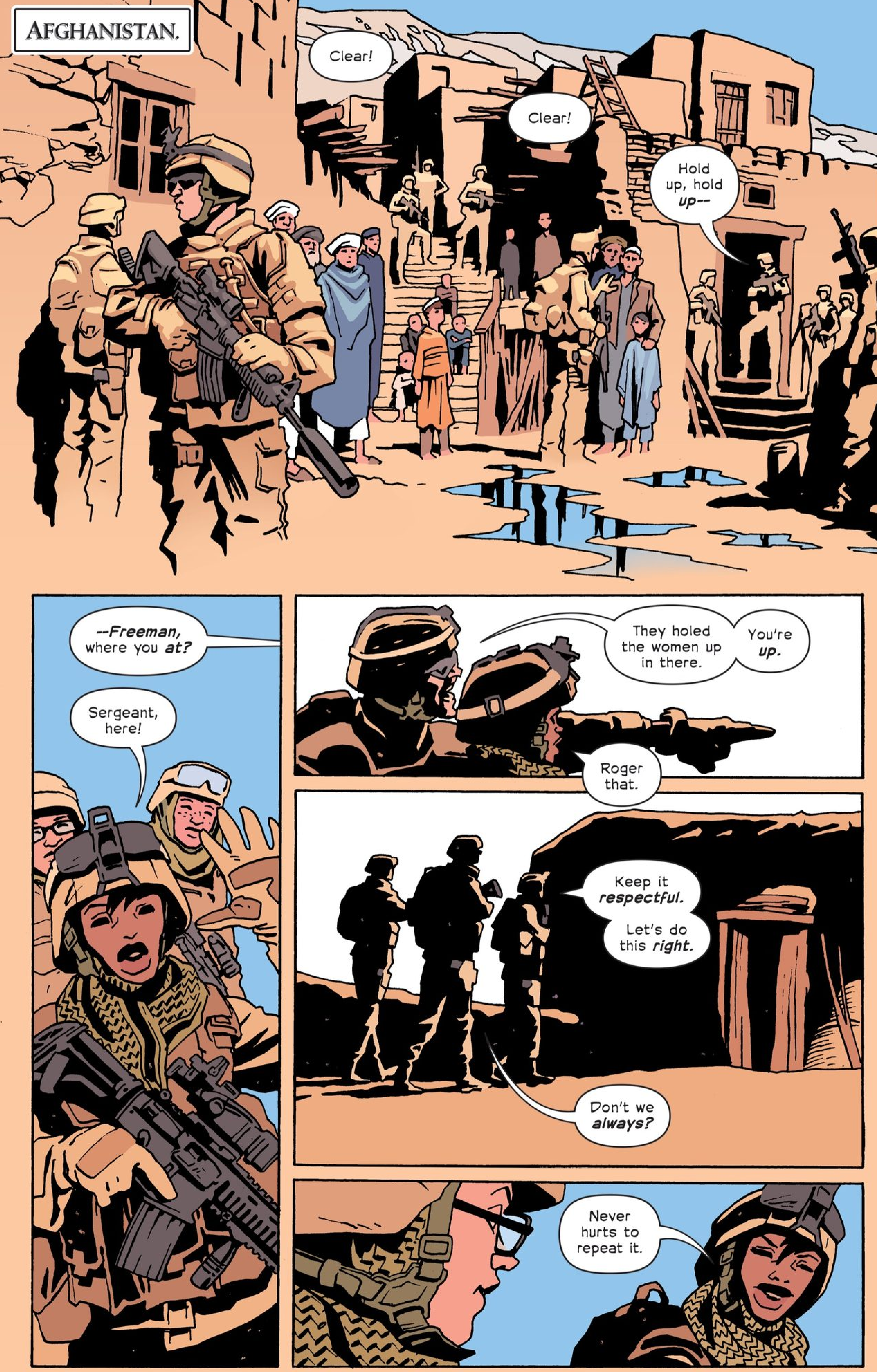

PARIS.
You get exactly *five* minutes, Copley...
...make them *count.*
Le Tambour
Andy. Nicky. You guys look ***good.***
Hell, it's like you haven't aged a ***day.***
Surabaya was, what? Eight years ago?
If you say so.
And you're down to four and a half minutes.
Fine.

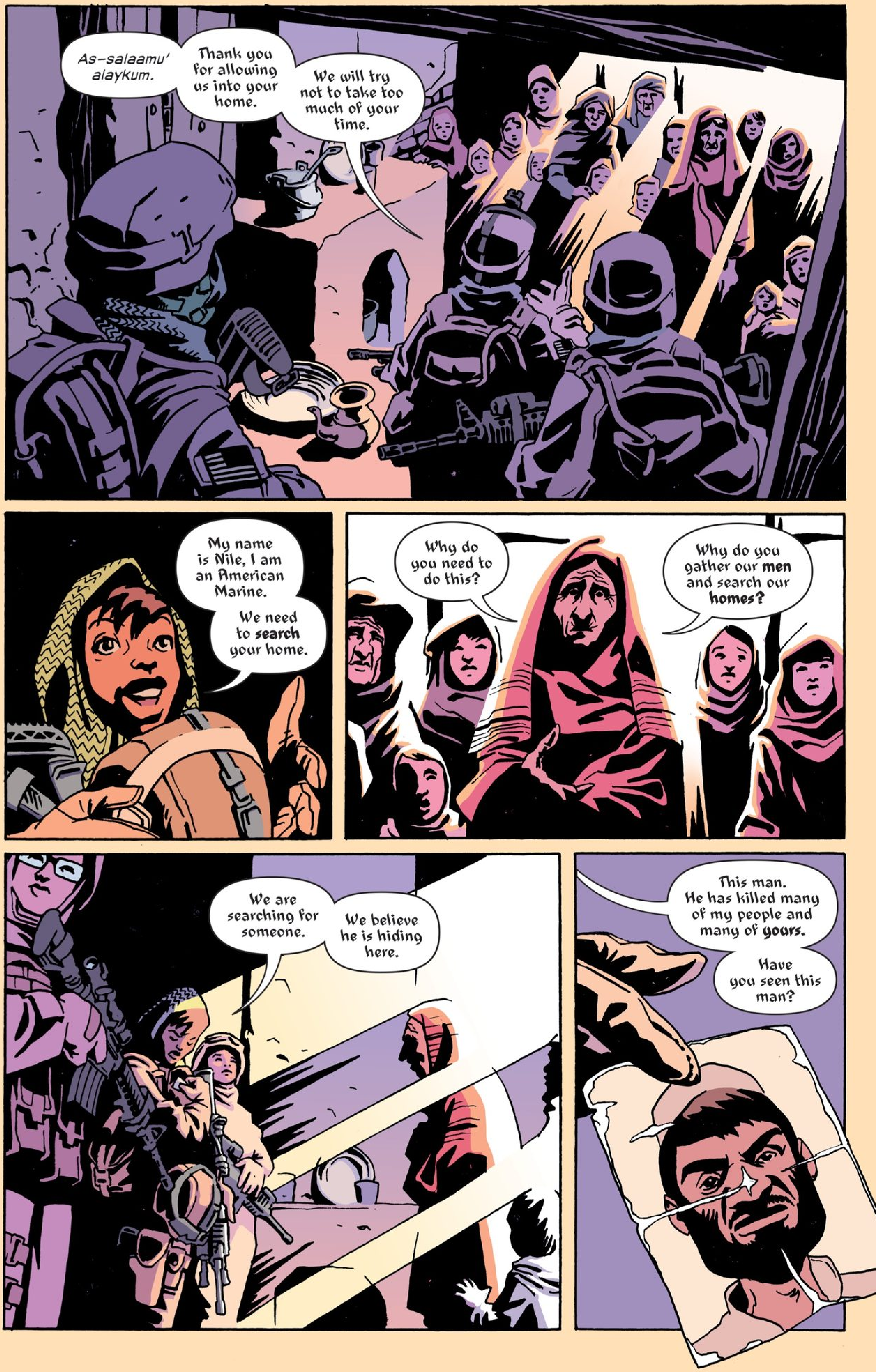

You may have heard, I'm not with the *Company* anymore.
Working private, security and intelligence for different clients.
BIENVENUE
I love how he calls it "The Company."
It's so *corporate.*
One of my clients is a private foundation, they do a lot of *human rights* work in North Africa.
Distributing medicine, food, building schools, hospitals. Things like *that.*
Yesterday afternoon local, a group of *armed men* attacked one of our schools about one hundred klicks southwest of Juba.
They killed the *teachers* and then abducted *seventeen* students at gunpoint.
The *girls,* Andy...
...they took the *girls.*
I called in some favors from my... Company days.

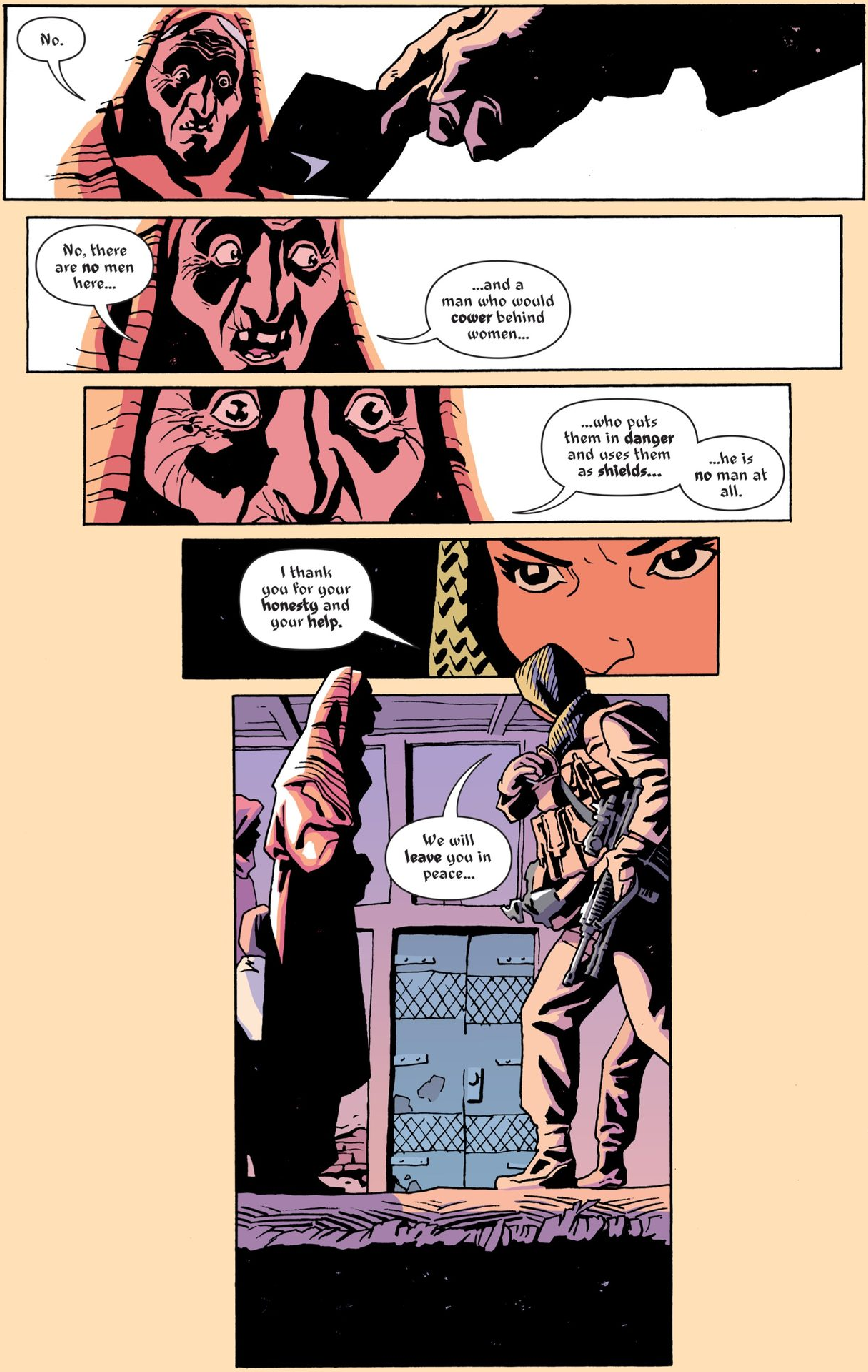

Using satellite imagery, we were able to *track* them.
We know where they *are,* Andy.
We need you to bring them *home.*
That has the *full* briefing.
Everything we could scrounge up, satellite imagery, maps...
...photos of the *building* where they're being *held...*
...but we haven't seen *any* signs of *food* or *water* being brought in for--
So they're not *staying* there long.
Or worse, they're going to *split* them up and we'll *never* find them.
8:43 PM
Satellite view
KLCK

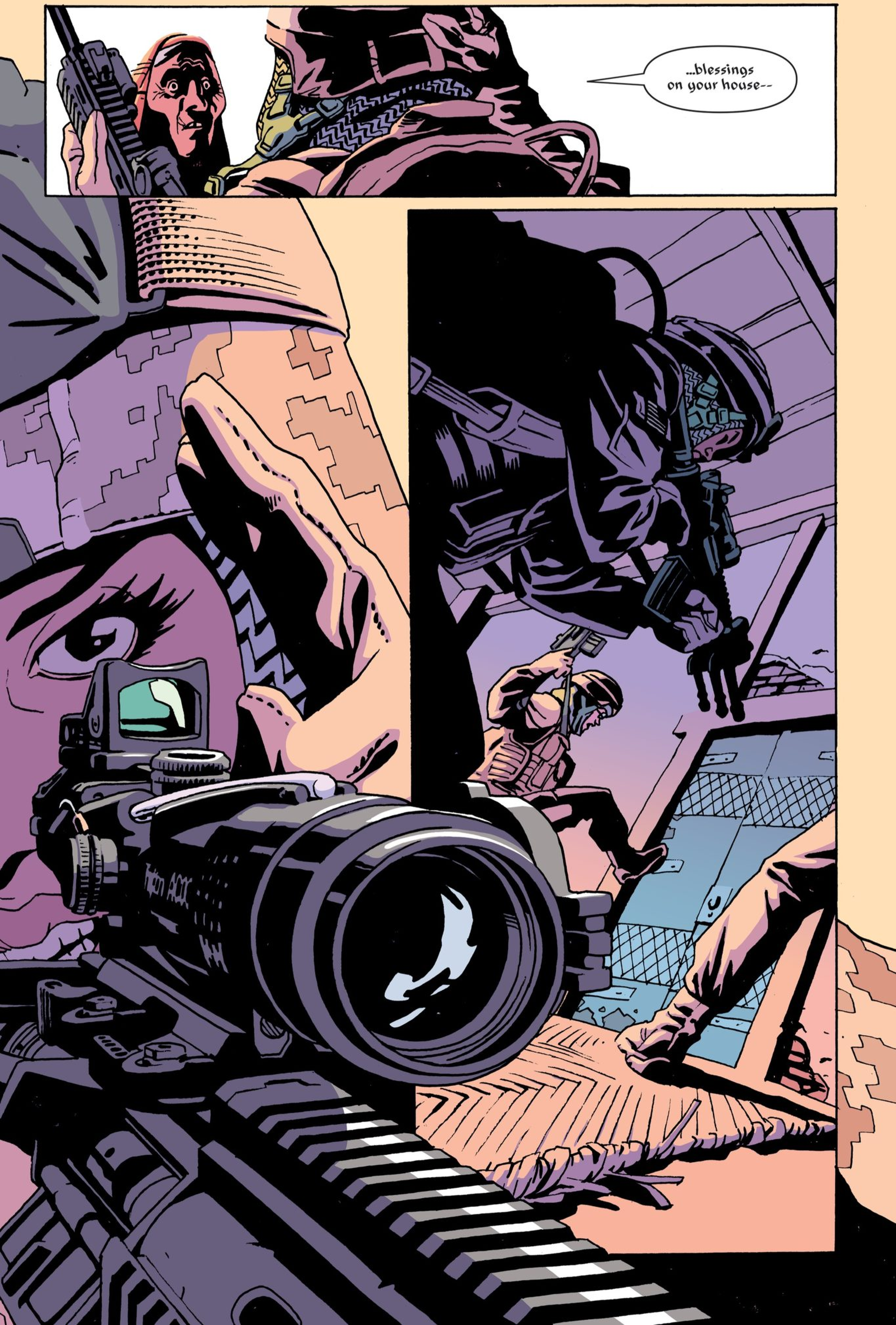

It's got to be done *fast.* It's got to be done by the *best.*
And dammit, Andy, your team's the *best* I've *ever* seen.
You can *name* your price.
Contact protocols are on that thing?
On the iPad? Yes.
You'll *do* it? We didn't set a *price--*
We'll be in *touch* when it's *done...*
Le Tambour
...we'll bill you *then.*

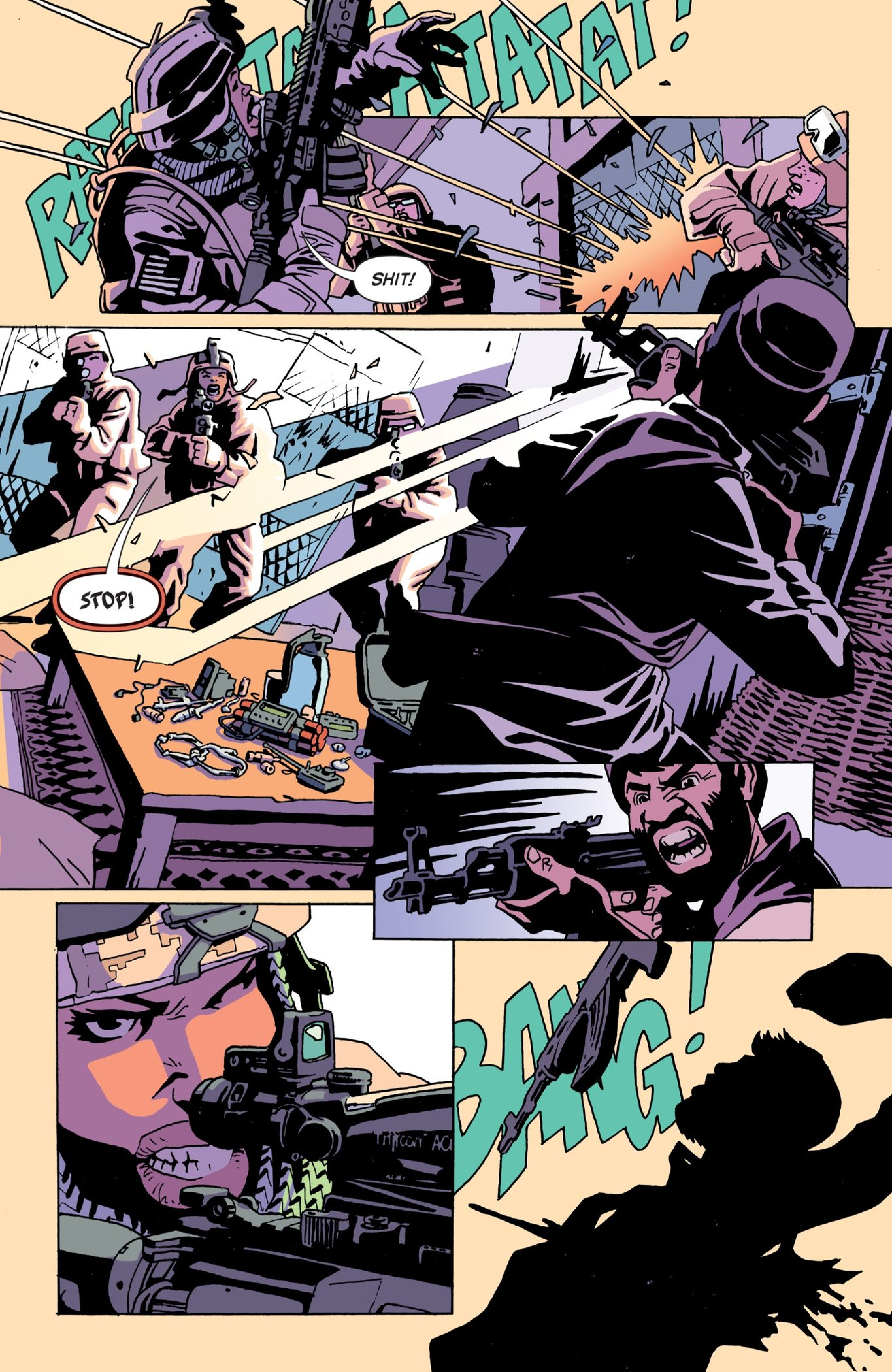

Oh, Athena's *tits...*
...come *on.*
It's the button on the *bottom.*
Thank you.
I liked the *old* ones. I *understood* those.
No, you couldn't work those, either.
Shut up, you.
No, Book, I was talking to Nicky. Just met with Copley, we're *on* but it's on *fire.*
HOTEL
TABAC
You and Joe meet us at the *cache* in Malta.
Call Wei, tell him to be at Luqa by thirteen hundred local, fueled and ready to roll...
...we're going in *hard....*

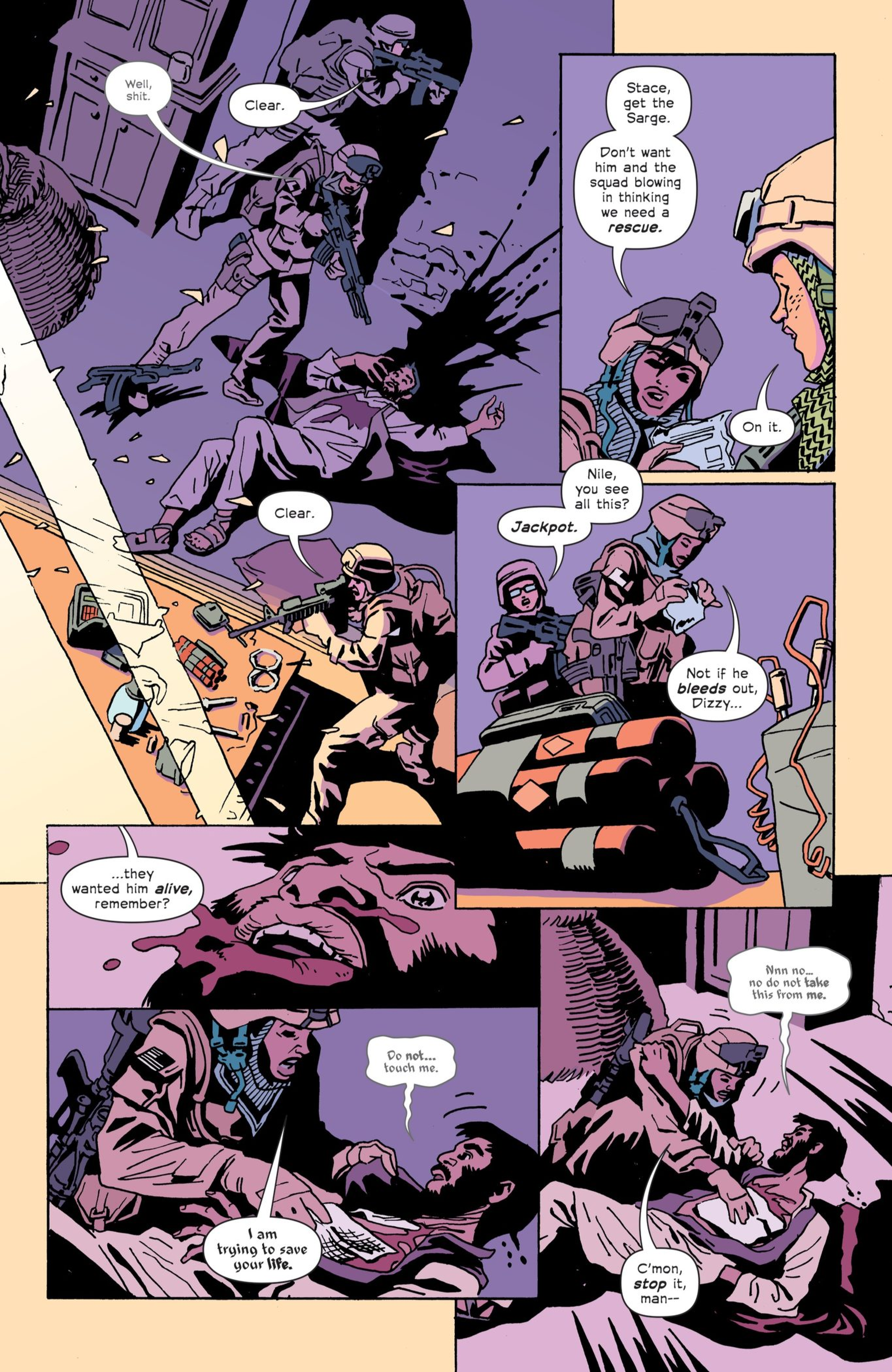

AFGHANISTAN.
Clear!
Clear!
Hold up, hold *up*--
--*Freeman*, where you *at?*
Sergeant, here!
They holed the women up in there.
You're *up.*
Roger that.
Keep it *respectful.*
Let's do this *right.*
Don't we *always?*
Never hurts to repeat it.

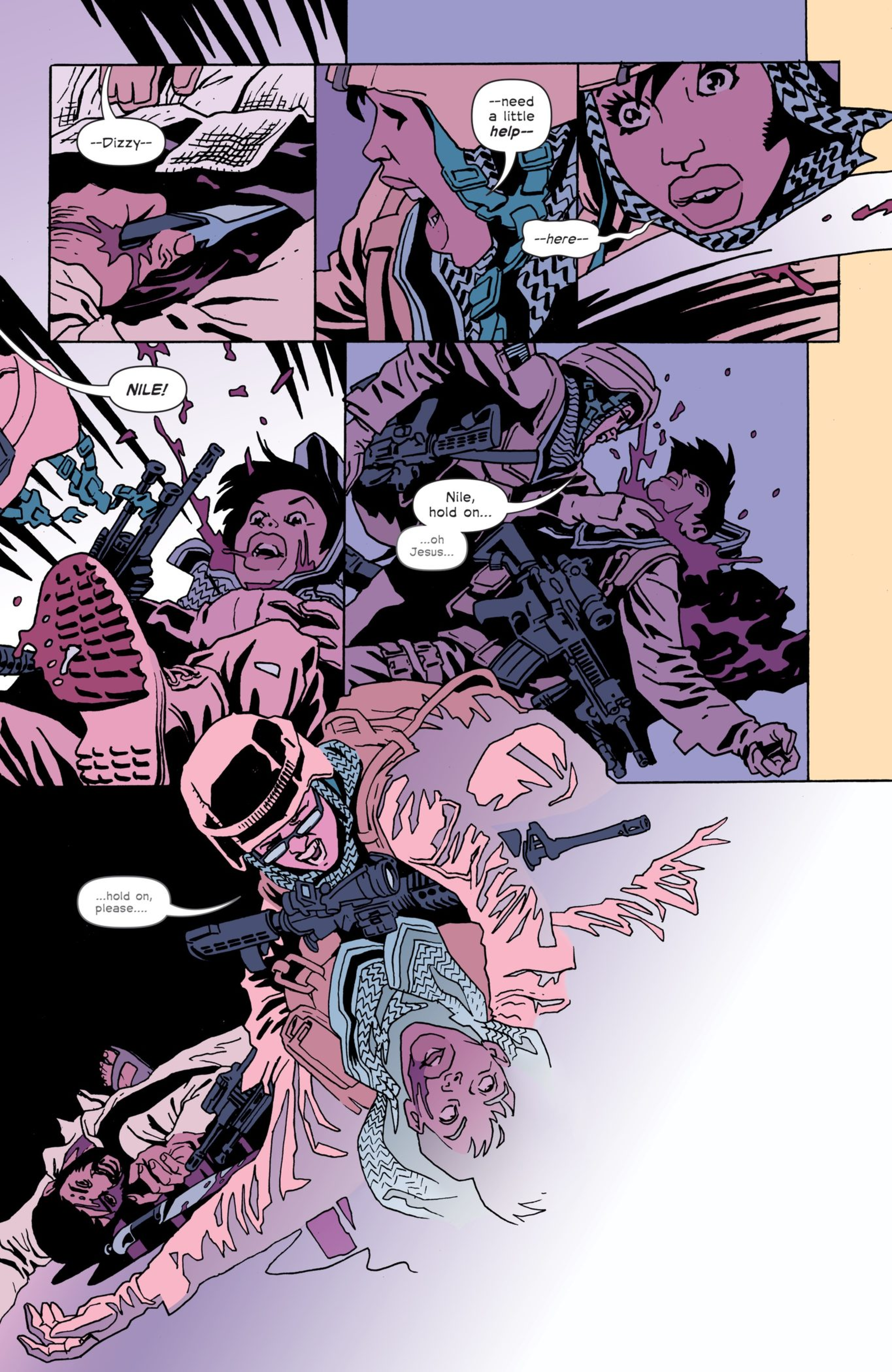

As-salaamu' alaykum.
Thank you for allowing us into your home.
We will try not to take too much of your time.
My name is Nile, I am an American Marine.
We need to **search** your home.
Why do you need to do this?
Why do you gather our **men** and search our **homes?**
We are searching for someone.
We believe he is hiding here.
This man. He has killed many of my people and many of **yours.**
Have you seen this man?

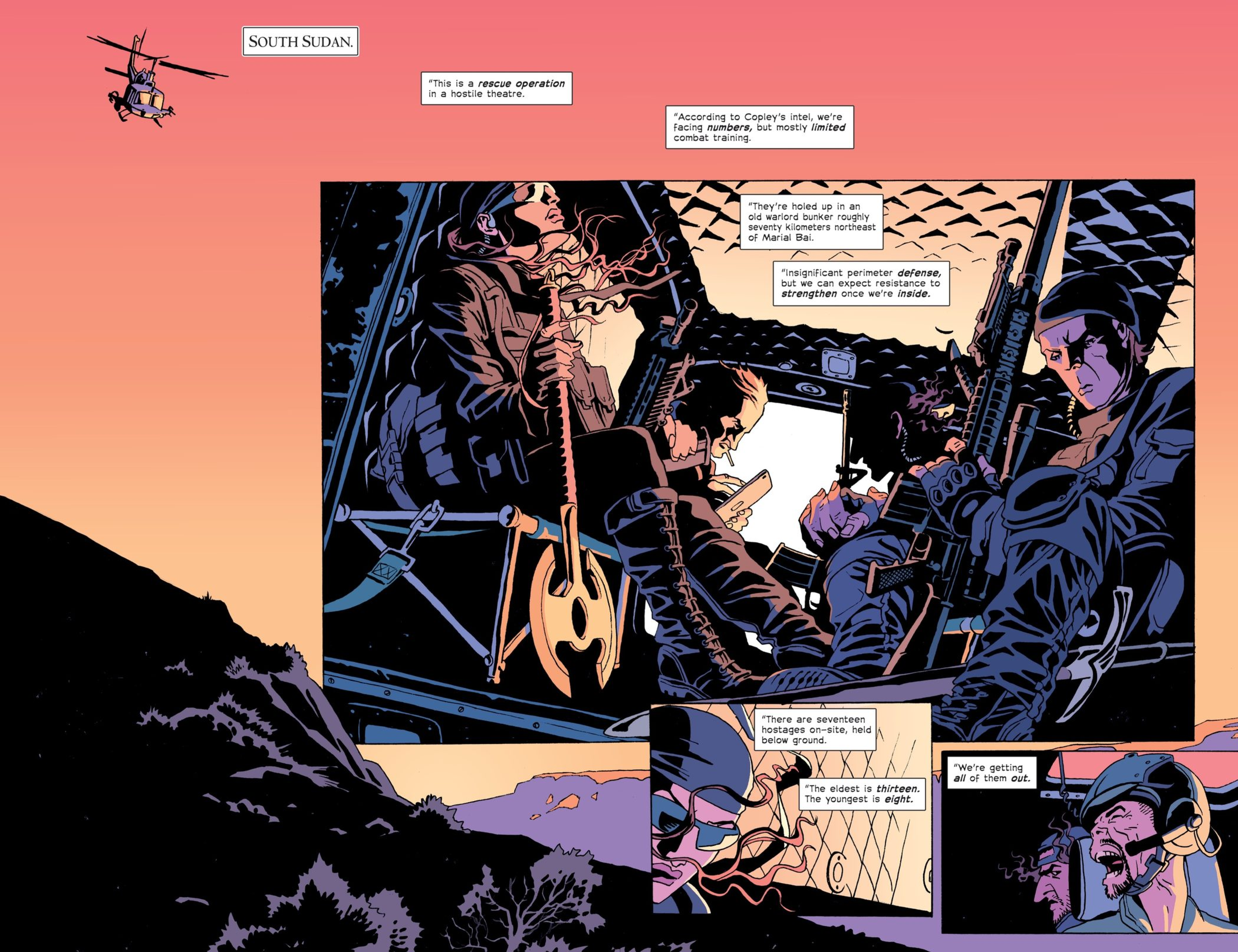

No.
No, there are no men here...
...and a man who would cower behind women...
...who puts them in danger and uses them as shields...
...he is no man at all.
I thank you for your honesty and your help.
We will leave you in peace...

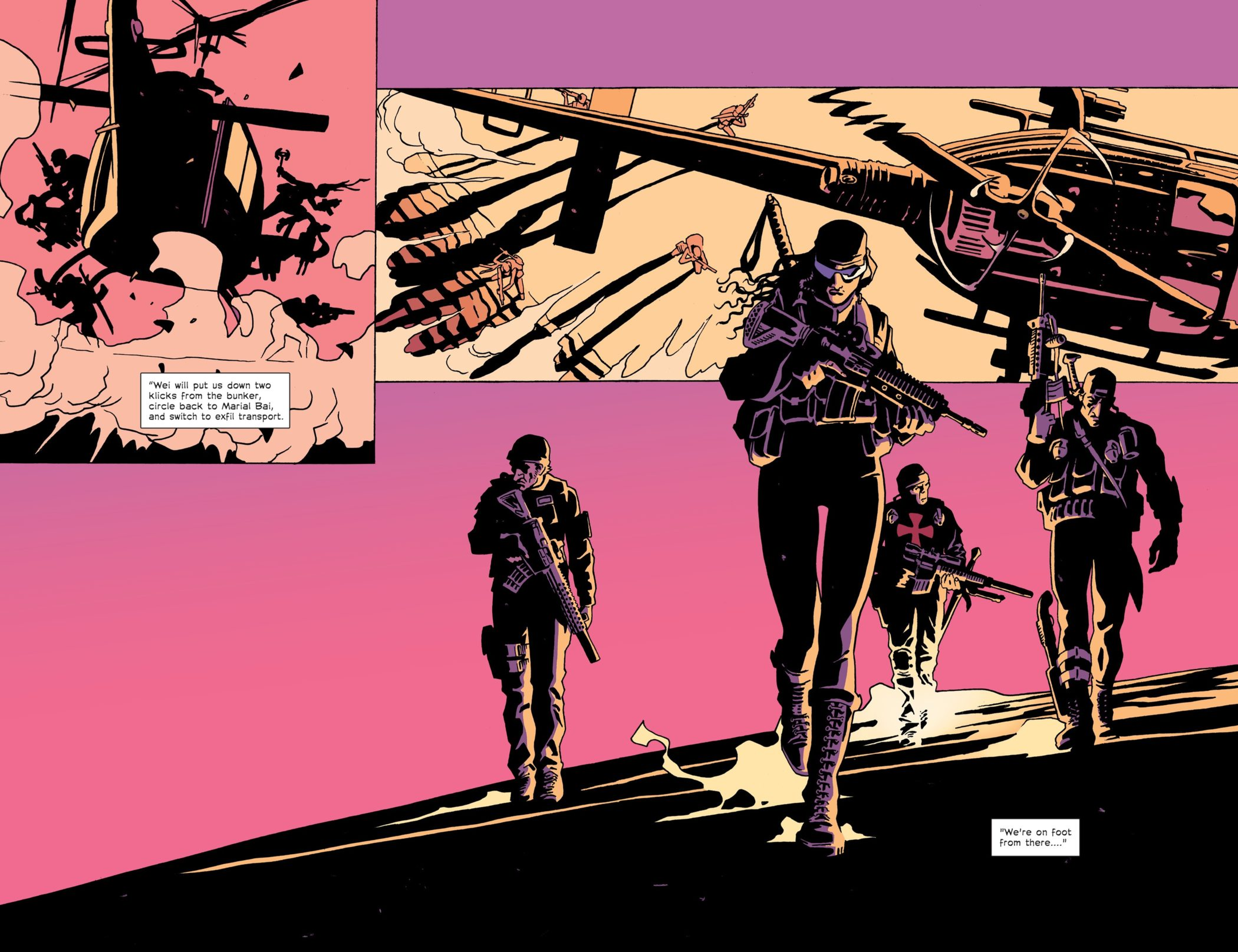

...blessings on your house--

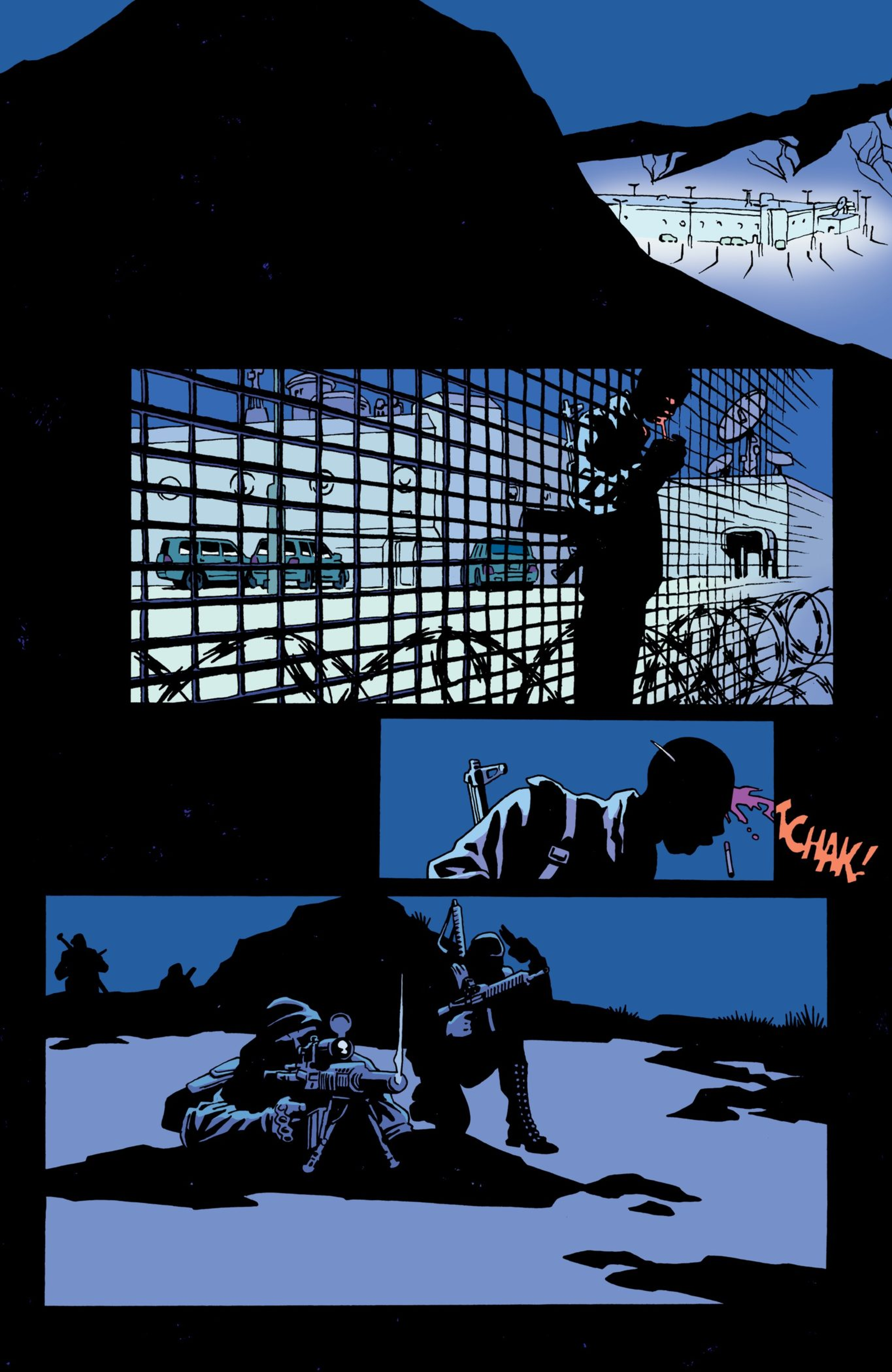

RATATATATAT!
SHIT!
STOP!
Trijicon AC
BANG!

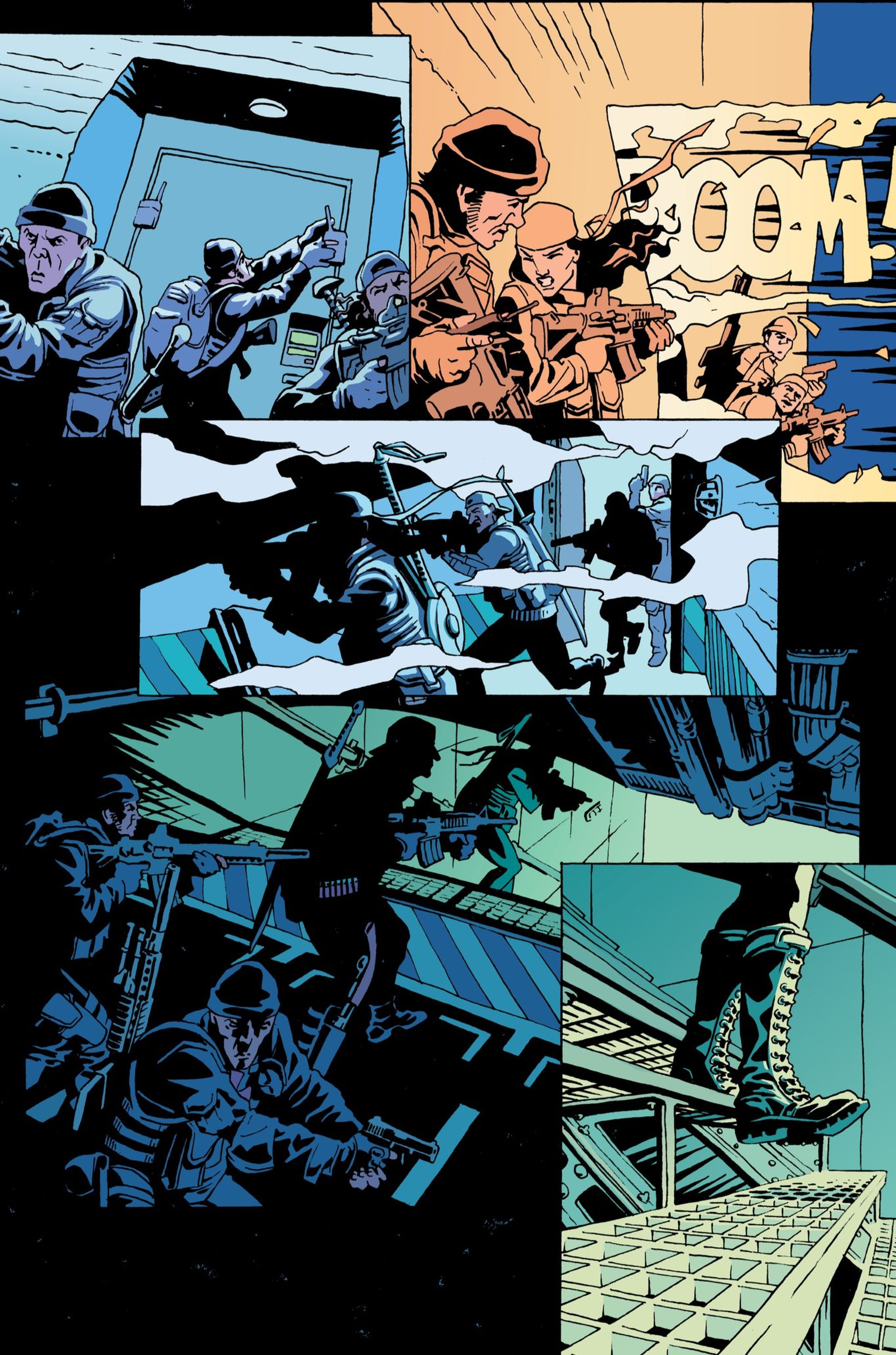

Well, shit.
Clear.
Stace, get the Sarge.
Don't want him and the squad blowing in thinking we need a ***rescue.***
On it.
Clear.
Nile, you see all this?
Jackpot.
Not if he ***bleeds*** out, Dizzy...
...they wanted him ***alive,*** remember?
Do **not**... touch me.
I am trying to save your **life.**
Nnn no... no do not **take** this from **me.**
C'mon, ***stop*** it, man--

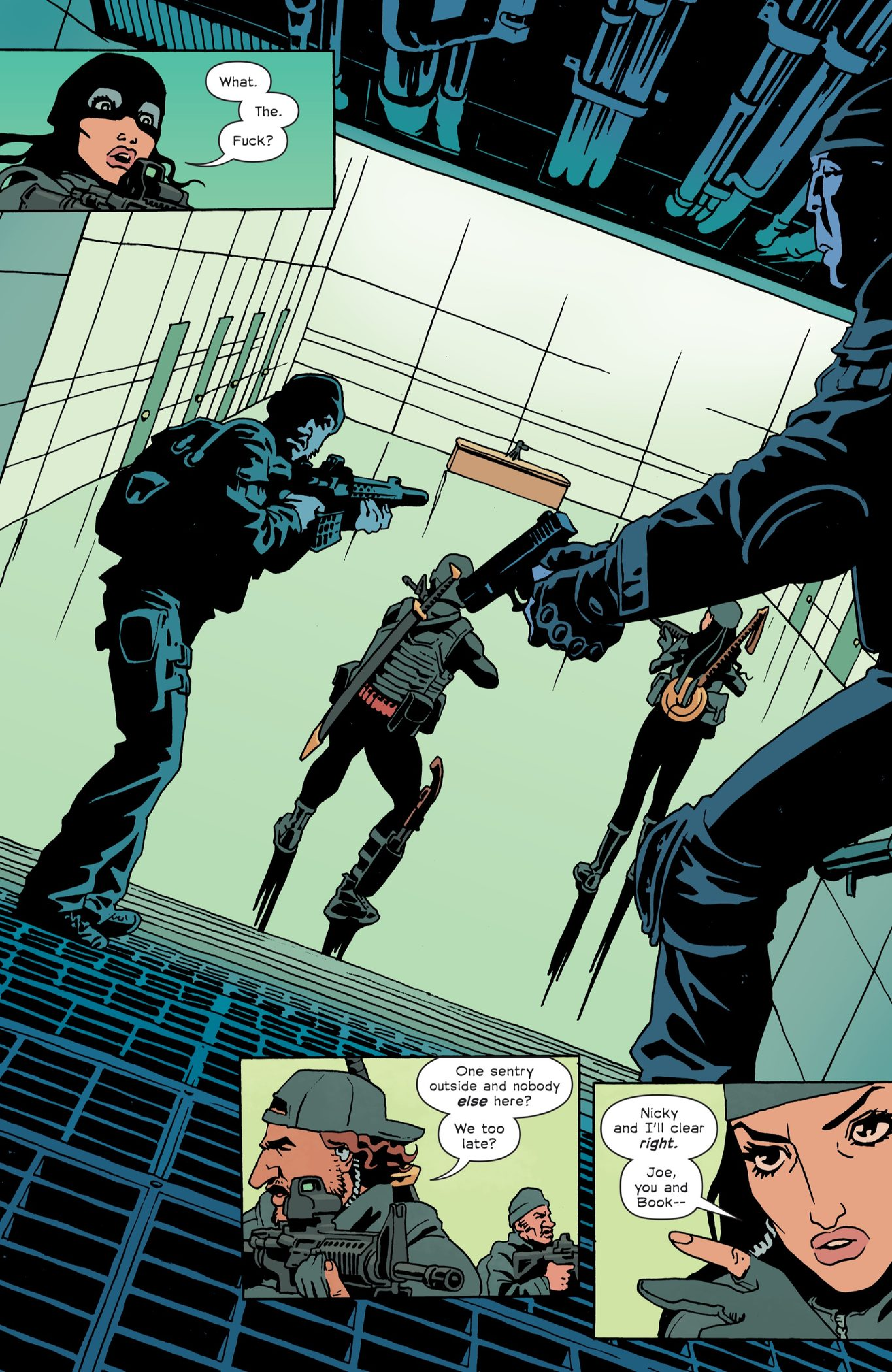

--Dizzy--
--need a little *help--*
--here--
NILE!
Nile, hold on...
...oh Jesus...
...hold on, please....

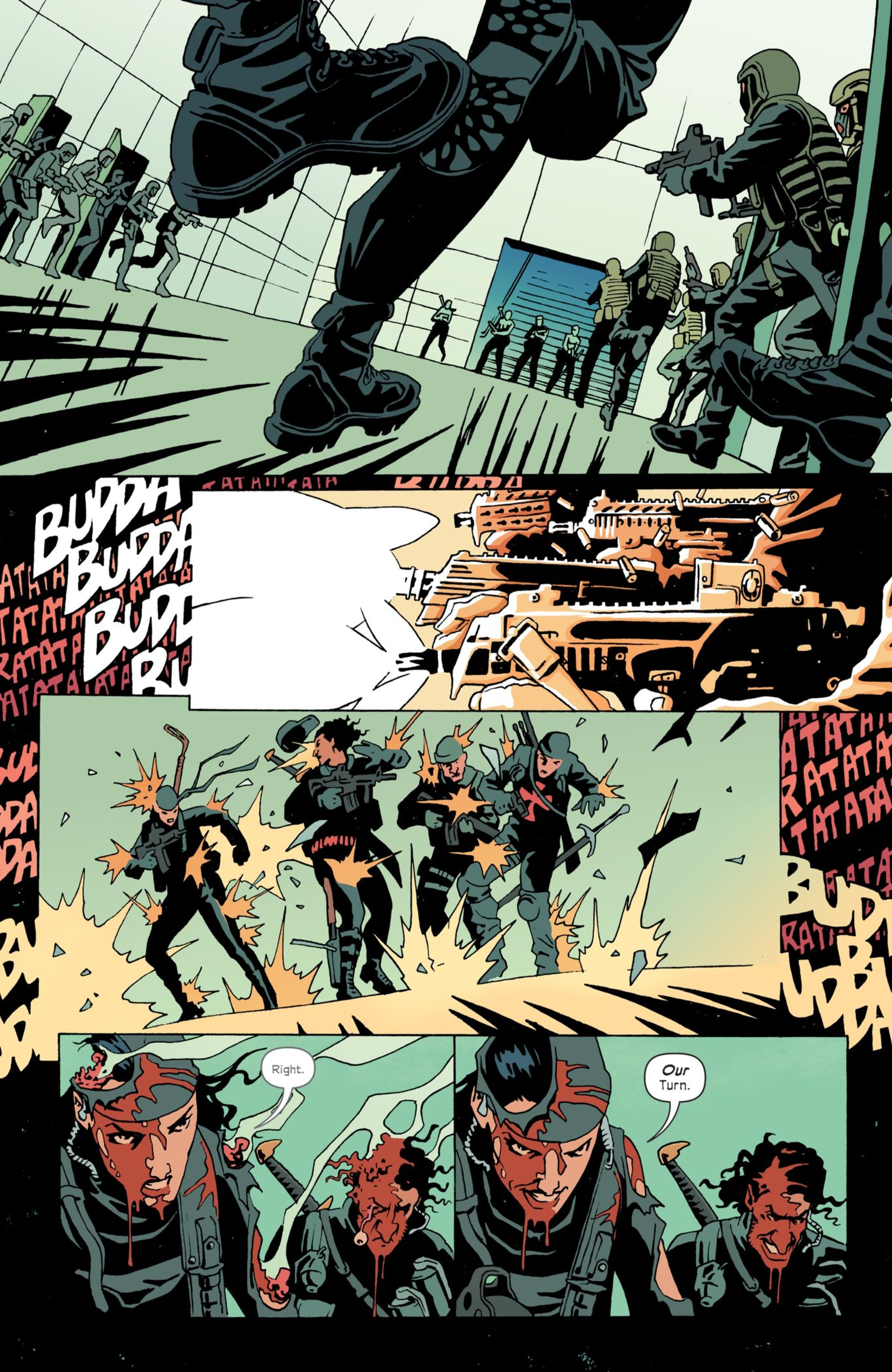

SOUTH SUDAN.
"This is a *rescue operation* in a hostile theatre.
"According to Copley's intel, we're facing *numbers,* but mostly *limited* combat training.
"They're holed up in an old warlord bunker roughly seventy kilometers northeast of Marial Bai.
"Insignificant perimeter *defense,* but we can expect resistance to *strengthen* once we're *inside.*
"There are seventeen hostages on-site, held below ground.
"The eldest is *thirteen.* The youngest is *eight.*
"We're getting *all* of them *out.*

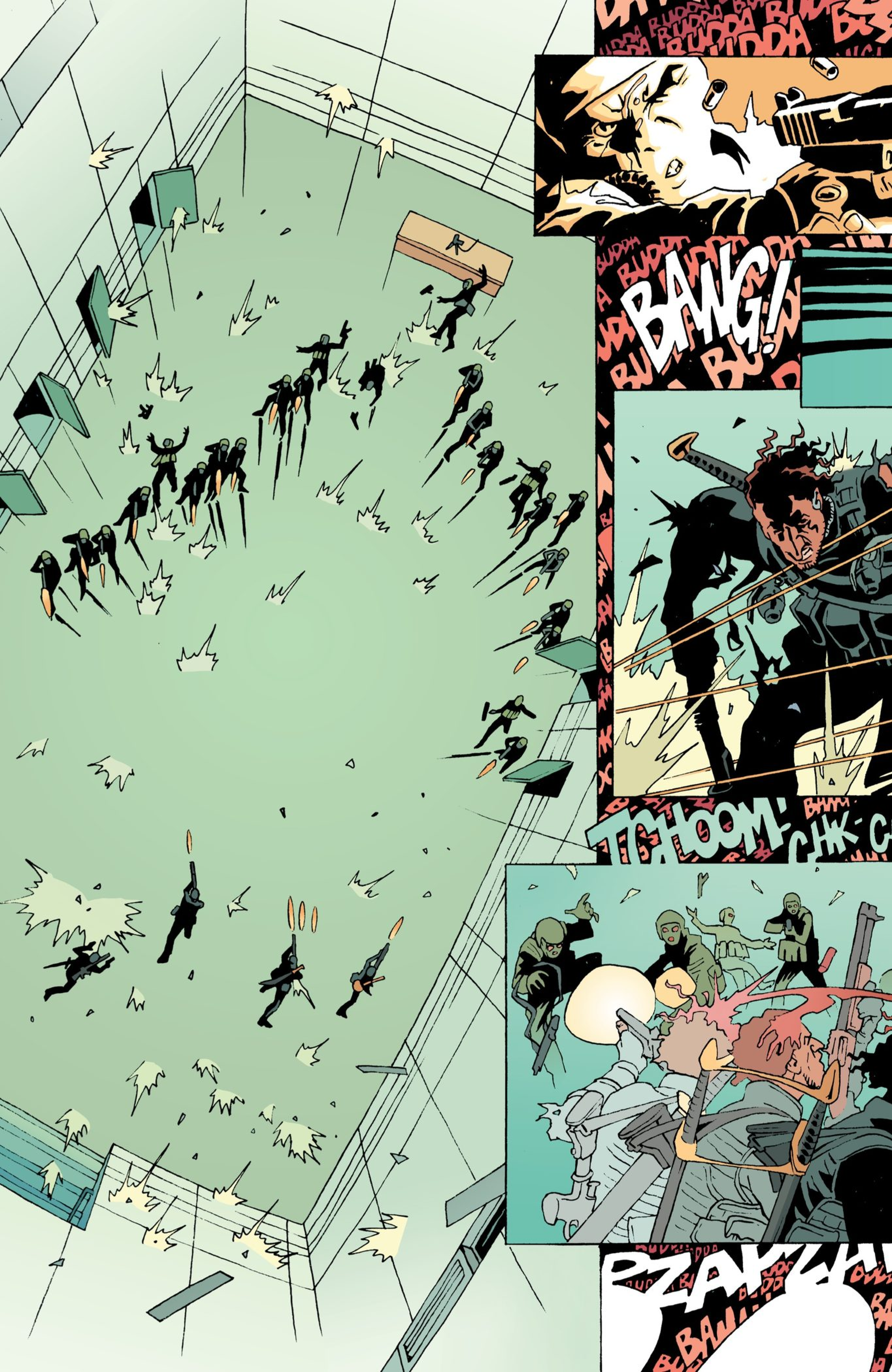

"Wei will put us down two klicks from the bunker, circle back to Marial Bai, and switch to exfil transport.
"We're on foot from there...."

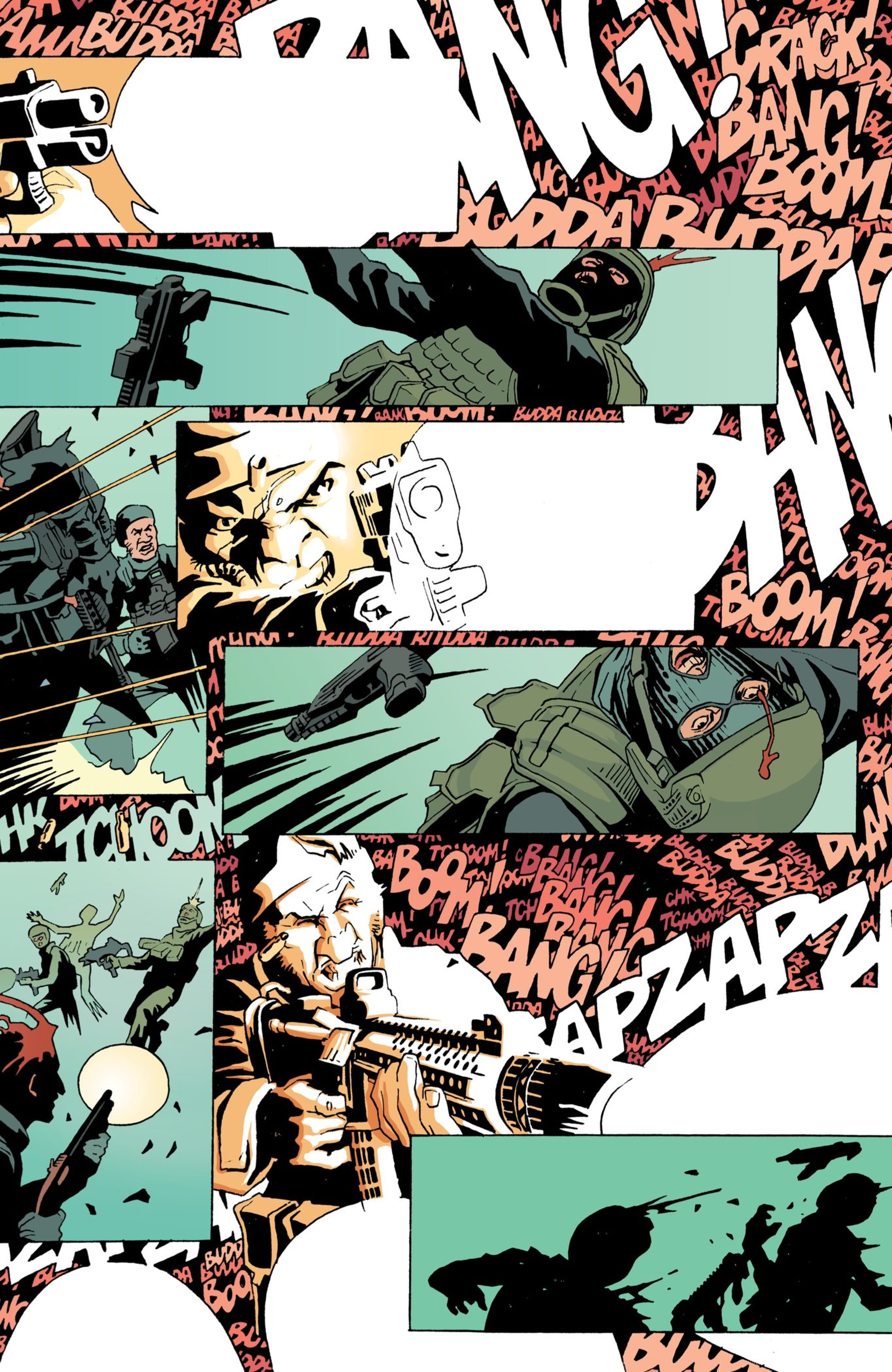

TCHAK!

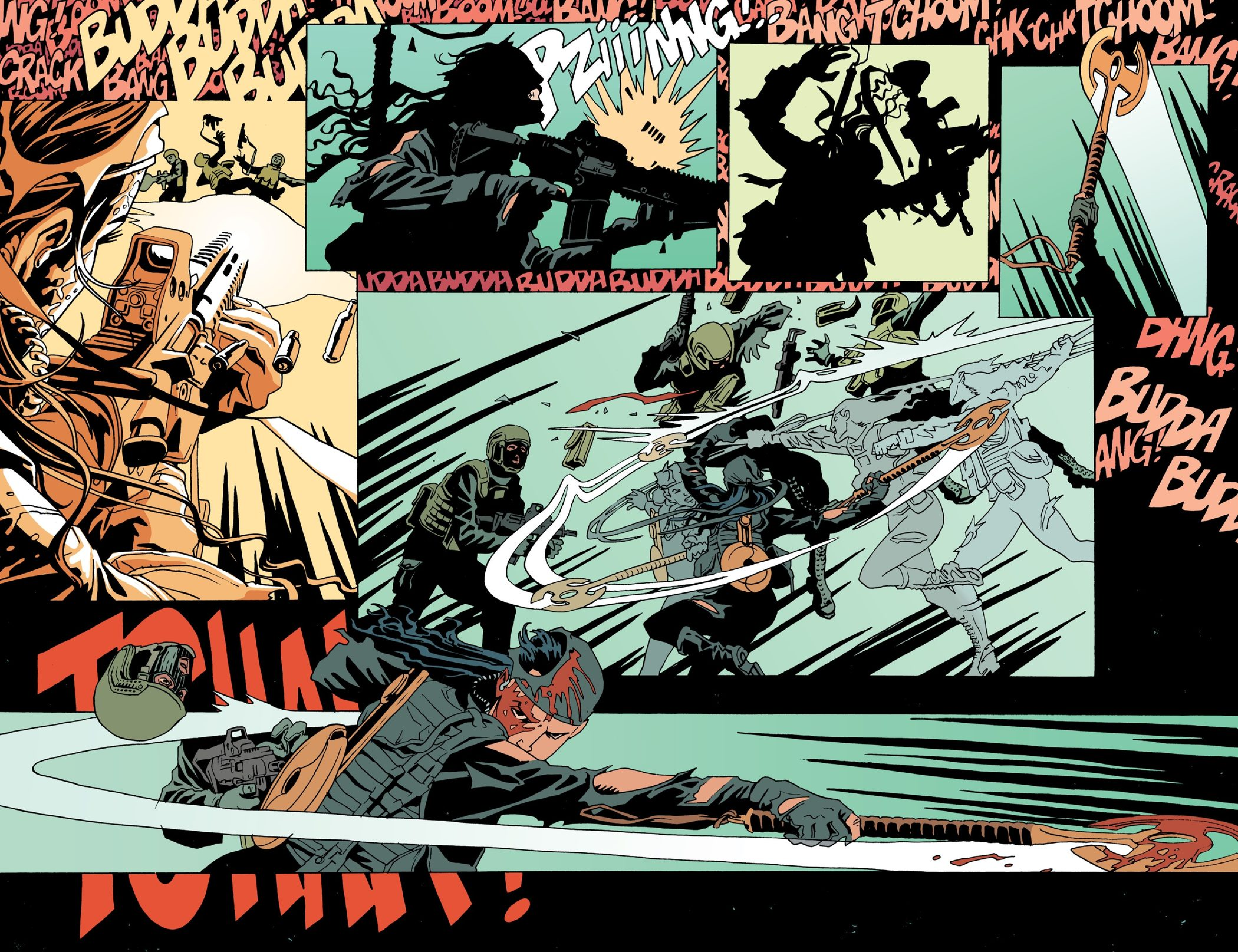

BOOM!

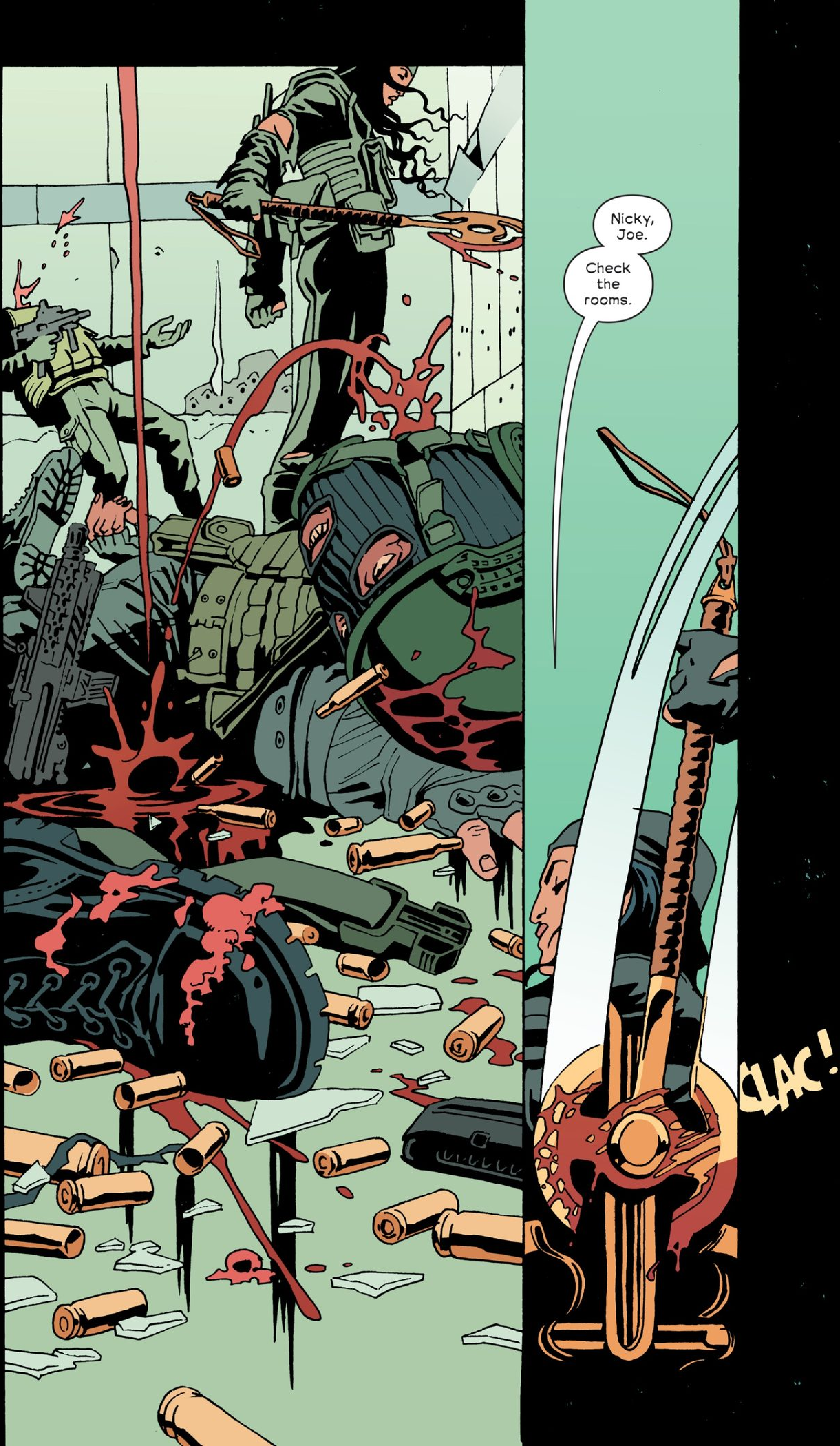

What.
The.
Fuck?
One sentry outside and nobody *else* here?
We too late?
Nicky and I'll clear *right.*
Joe, you and Book--

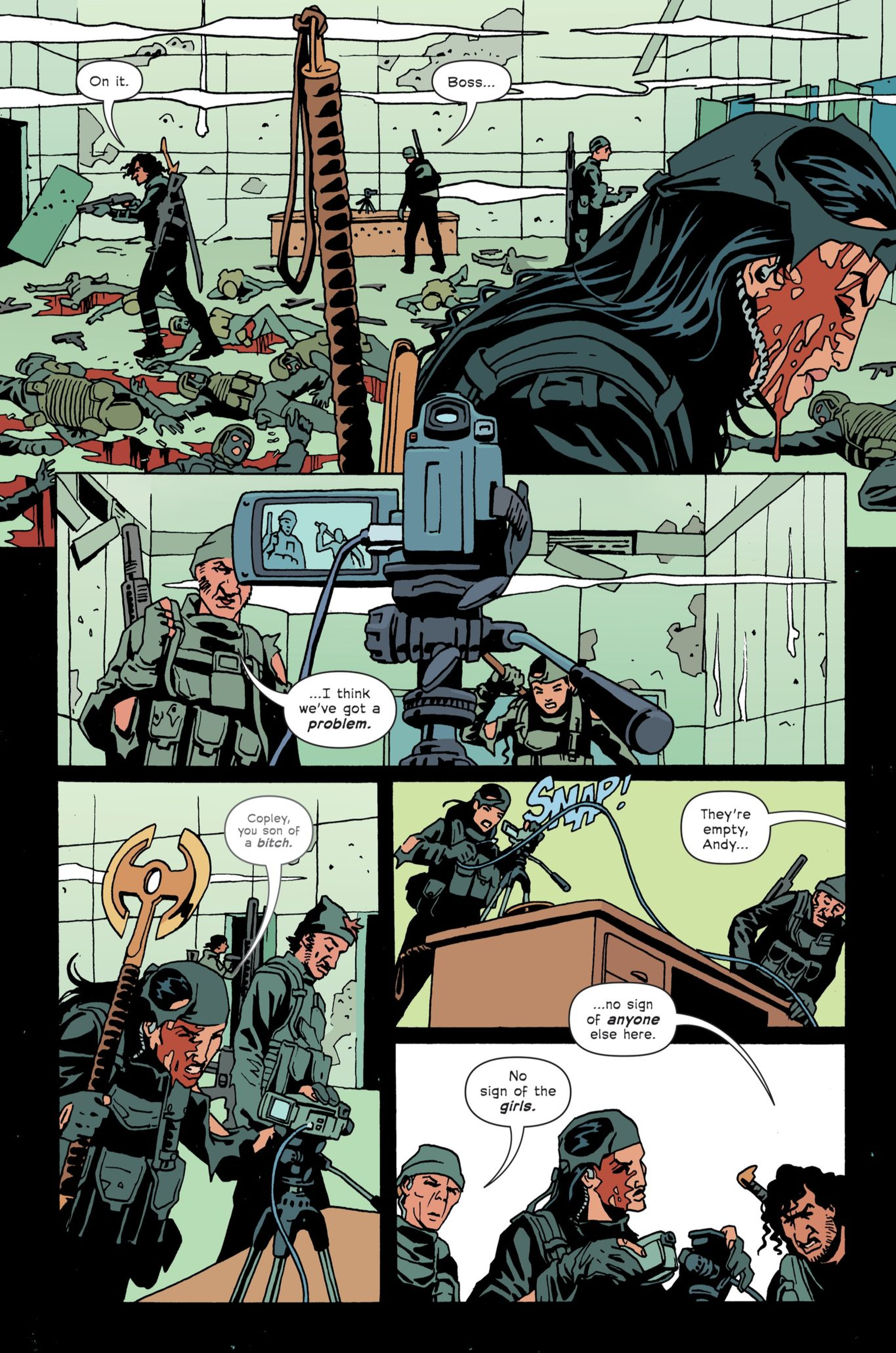

BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDD
RATATAT
TATATA
RATATAT
TATATA
BUDDA
BUDDA
RATATAT
TATATAT
Right.
Our Turn.

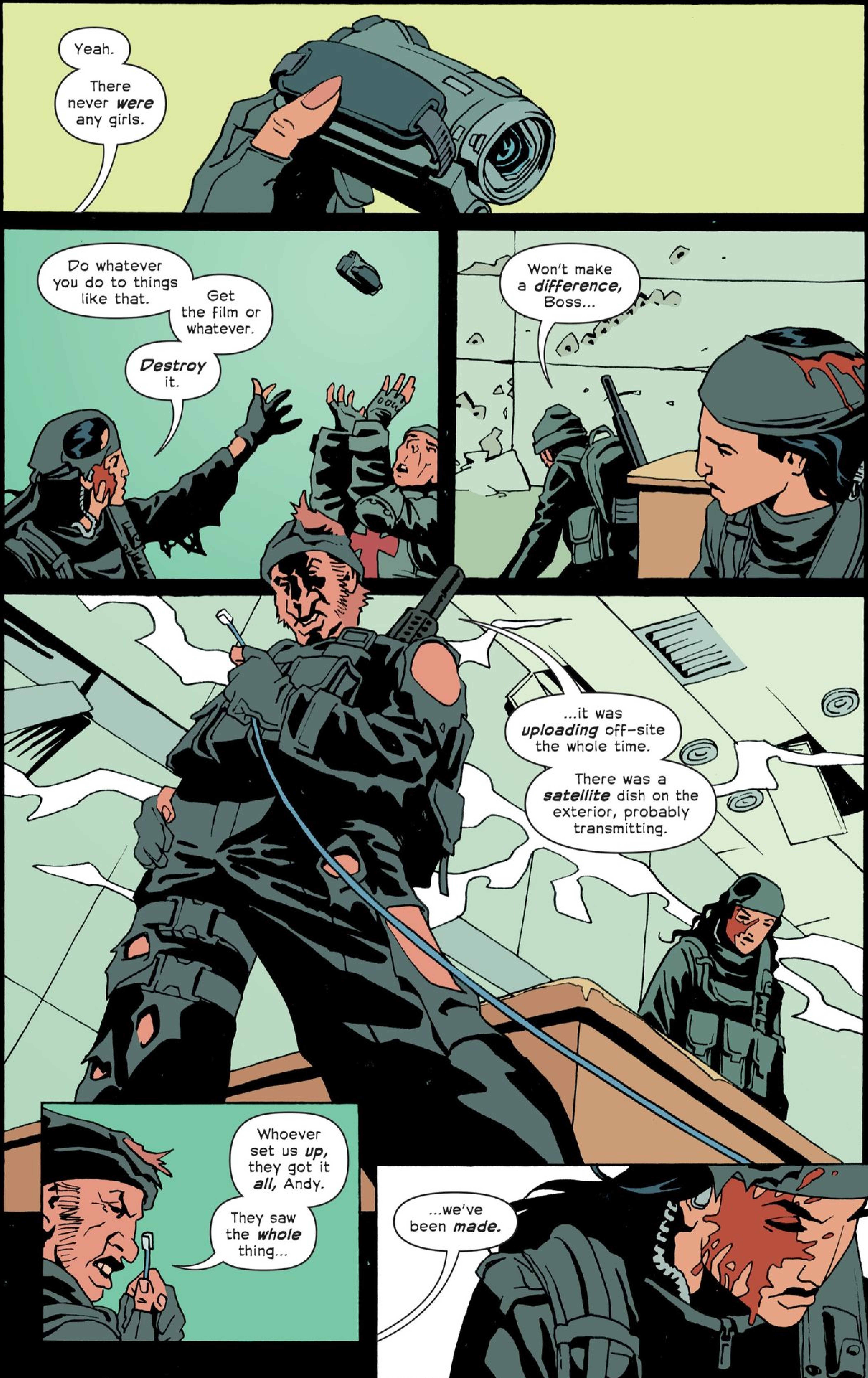

BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
BANG!
BUDDA BUDDA
TCHOOM!
CHK-C
BZAK
BUDDA BUDDA

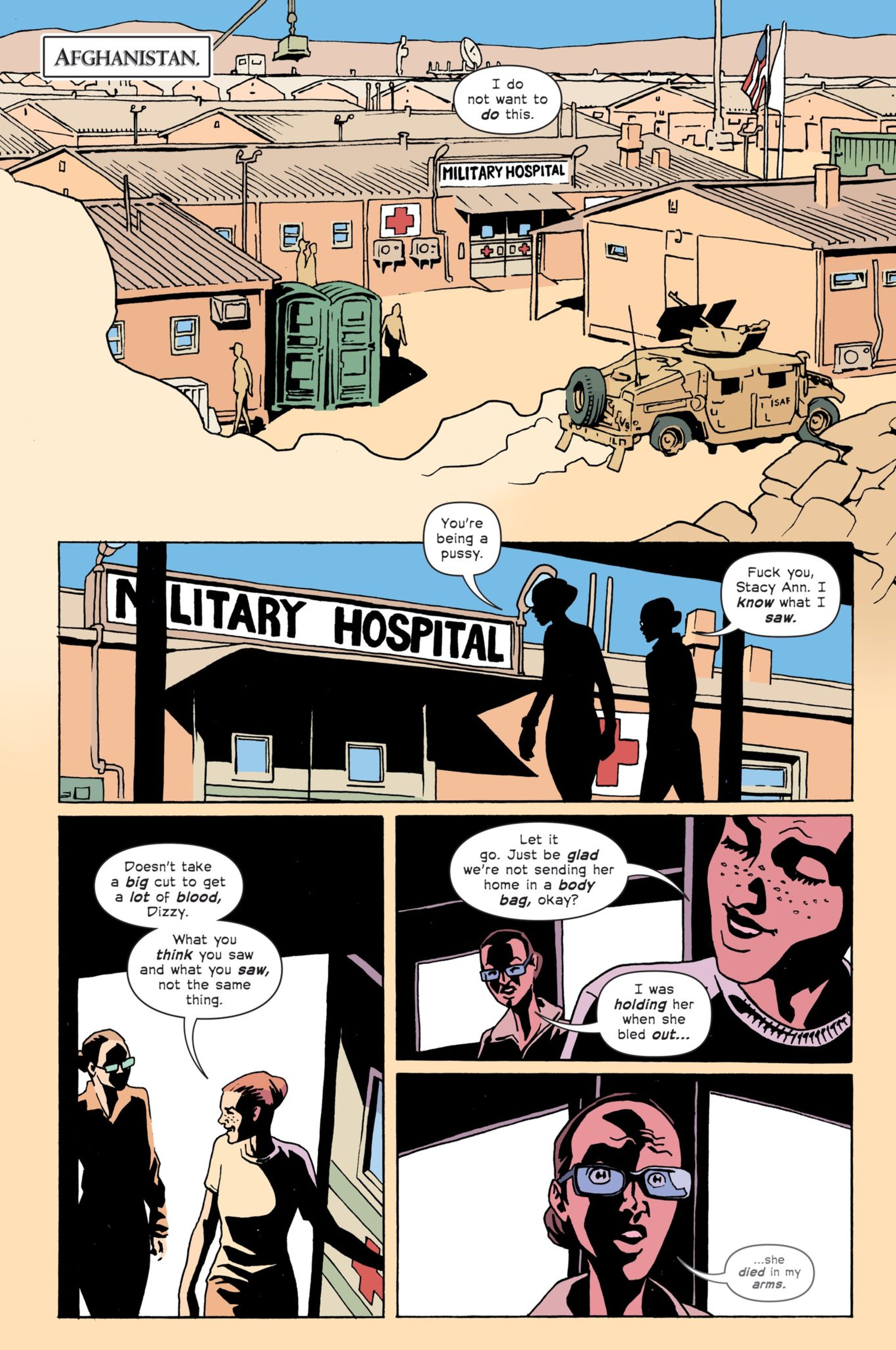

BUDDA BUDDA
BANG!
CRACK!
BANG!
BOOM!
BUDDA BUDDA
BOOM!
BUDDA BUDDA
BOOM!
TCHOOM!
TCHOOM
BOOM!
BANG!
BANG!
TCHOOM!
ZAPZAPZAP
BUDDA BOOM

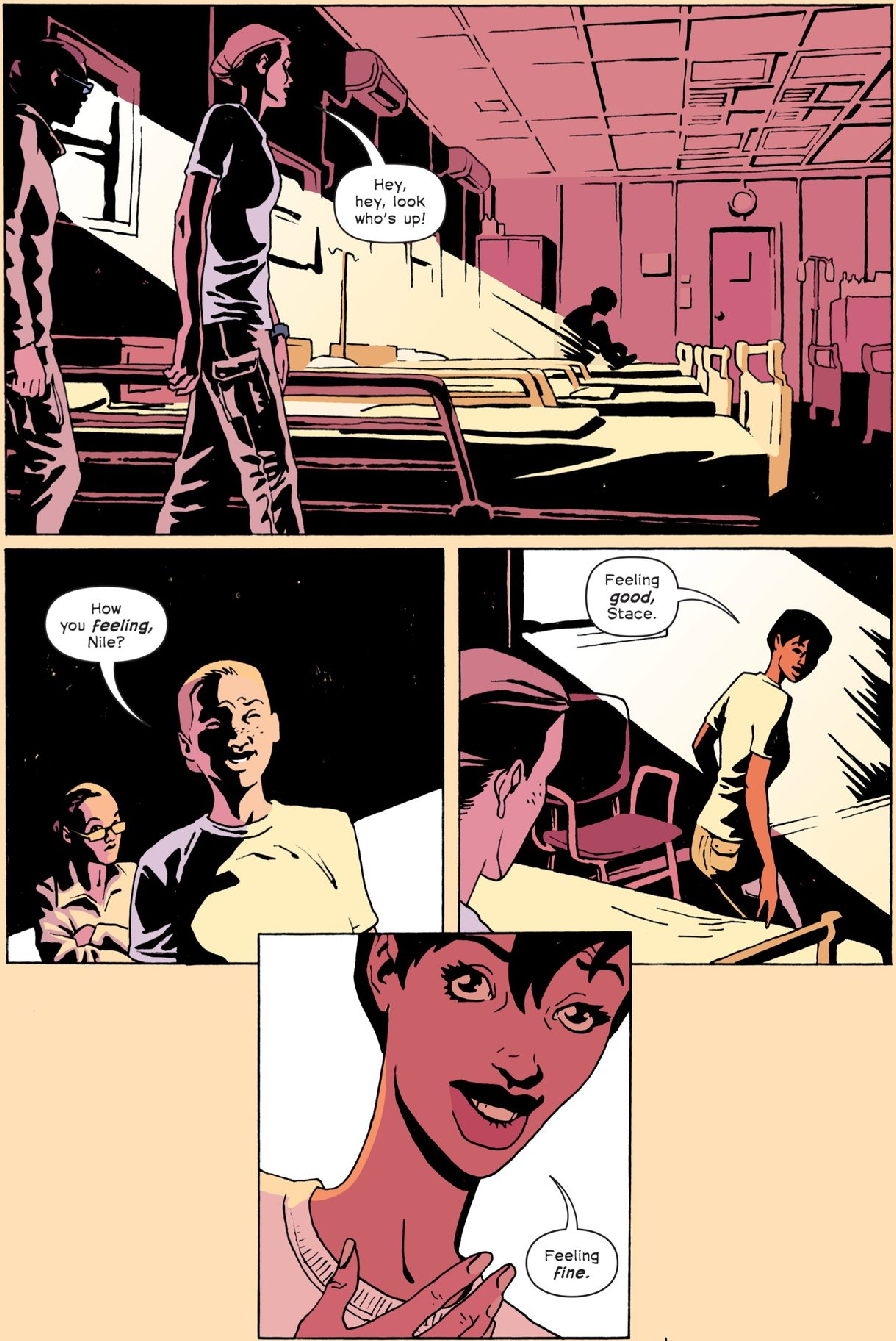

CRACK
BANG
BUDDA
BOOM
PZIIIINNNG!
BANG! TCHOOM!
CHK-CHK TCHOOM!
BANG!
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
CRACK
DHAG!
BUDDA
BANG!
BUDDA


Nicky, Joe.
Check the rooms.
CLAC!


On it.
Boss...
...I think we've got a *problem.*
Copley, you son of a *bitch.*
SNAP!
They're empty, Andy...
...no sign of *anyone* else here.
No sign of the *girls.*


Yeah.
There never *were* any girls.
Do whatever you do to things like that.
Get the film or whatever.
Destroy it.
Won't make a *difference,* Boss...
...it was *uploading* off-site the whole time.
There was a *satellite* dish on the exterior, probably transmitting.
Whoever set us *up,* they got it *all,* Andy.
They saw the *whole* thing...
...we've been *made.*

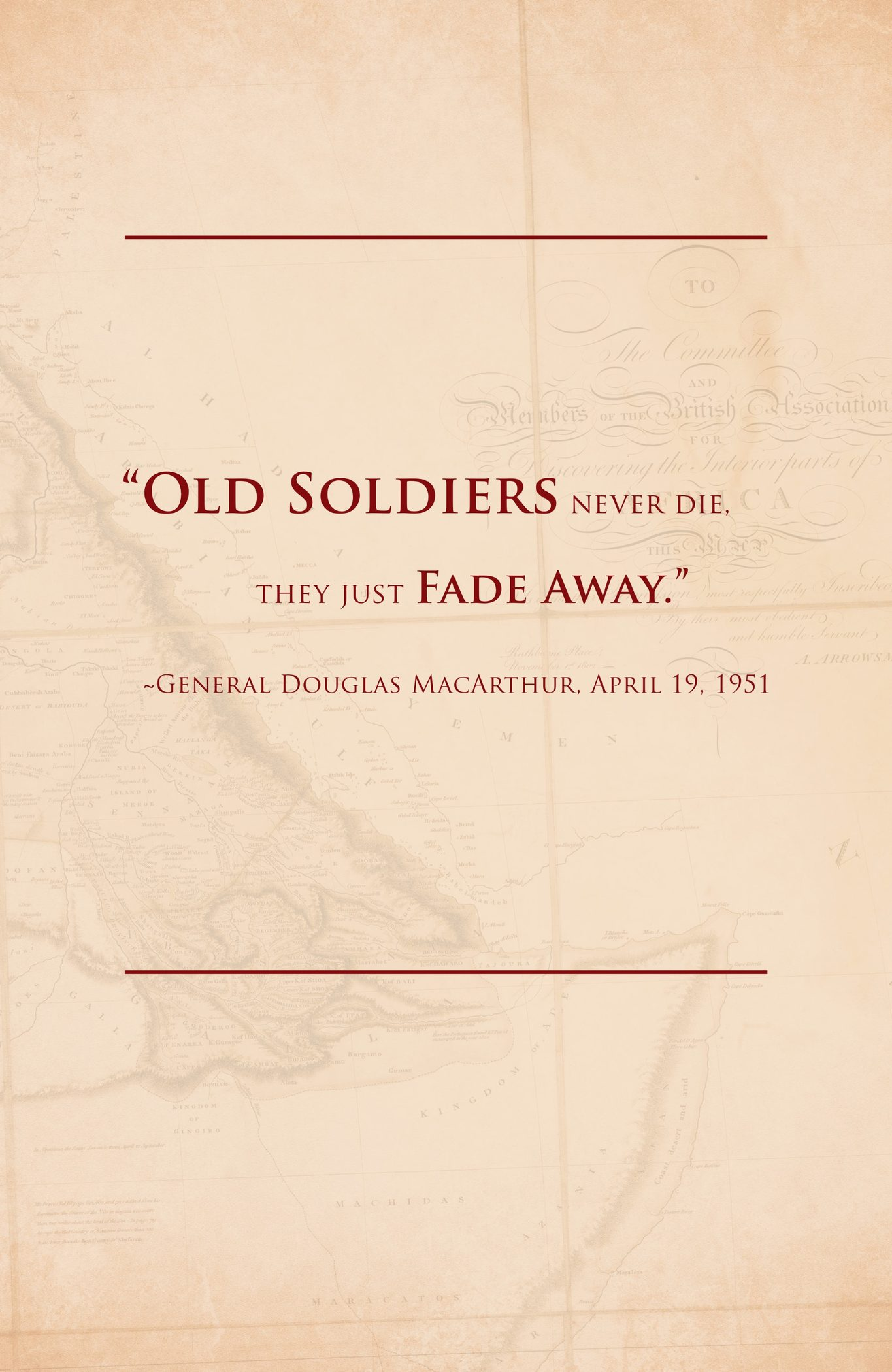

AFGHANISTAN.
MILITARY HOSPITAL
I do not want to *do* this.
ISAF
You're being a pussy.
MILITARY HOSPITAL
Fuck you, Stacy Ann. I *know* what I *saw.*
Doesn't take a *big* cut to get a *lot* of *blood,* Dizzy.
What you *think* you saw and what you *saw,* not the same thing.
Let it go. Just be *glad* we're not sending her home in a *body bag,* okay?
I was *holding* her when she bled *out...*
...she *died* in my *arms.*


Hey, hey, look who's up!
How you *feeling,* Nile?
Feeling *good,* Stace.
Feeling *fine.*

LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ

LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ

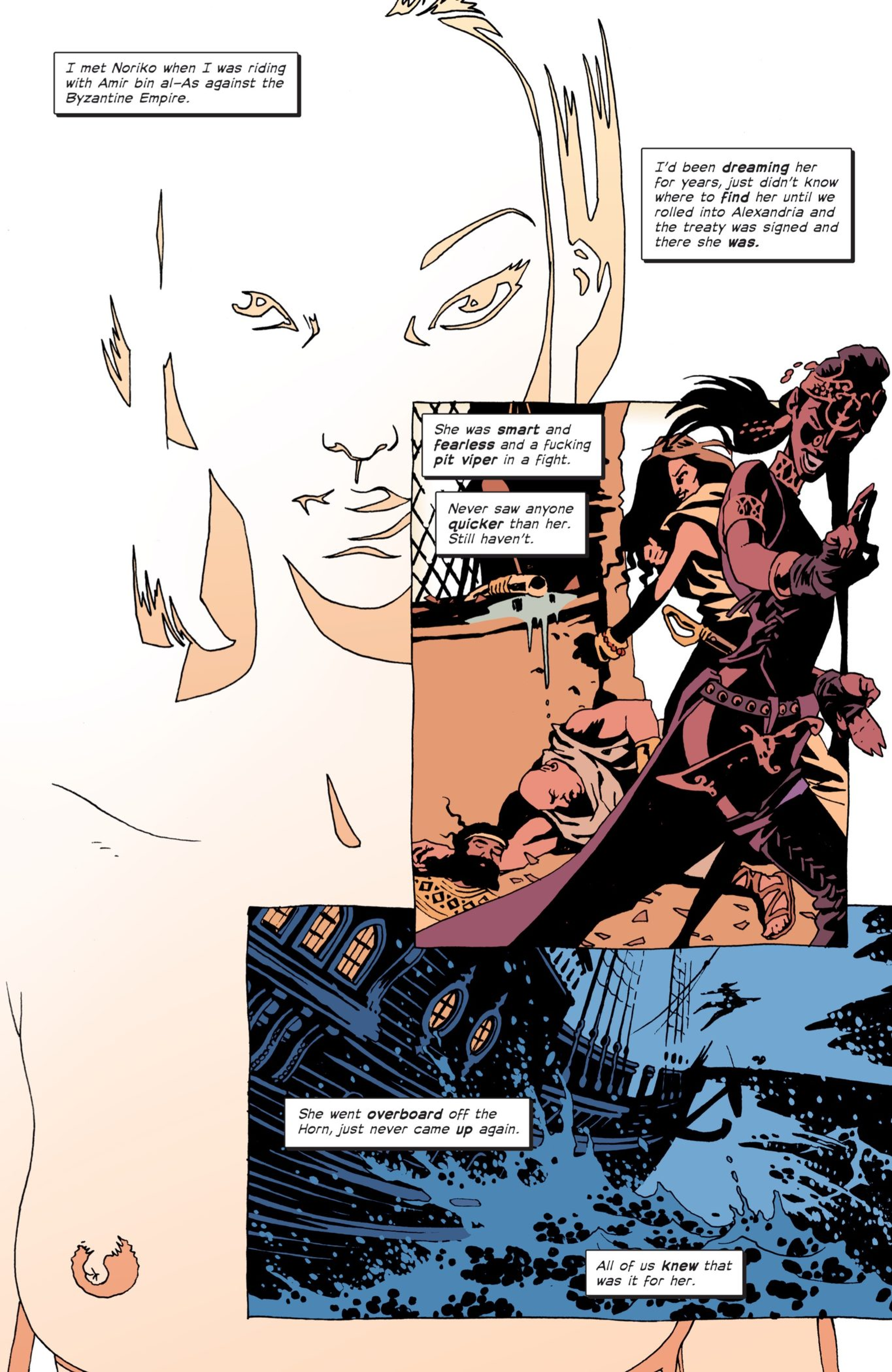
CHAPTER TWO

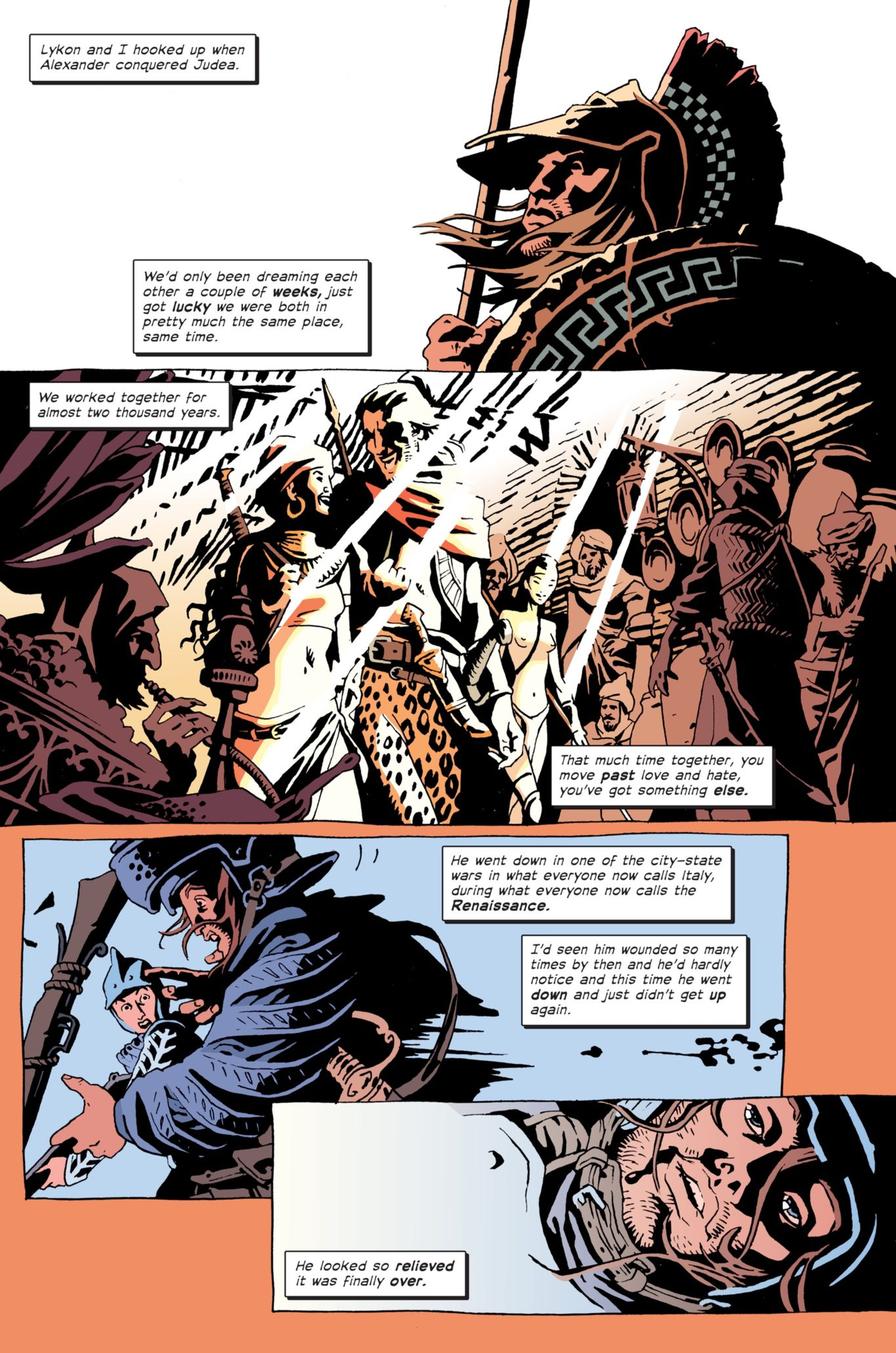

TO
The Committee
AND
Members of the British Association
FOR
Discovering the Interior parts of
AFRICA
THIS MAP
By their most obedient and humble Servant
A. ARROWSM
PALESTINE
ARABIA
MECCA
YEMEN
NUBIA
ISLAND OF MEROE
SENNAAR
DONGOLA
KINGDOM OF ADEL
MACHIDAS
MARACATOS
Coast desert and arid

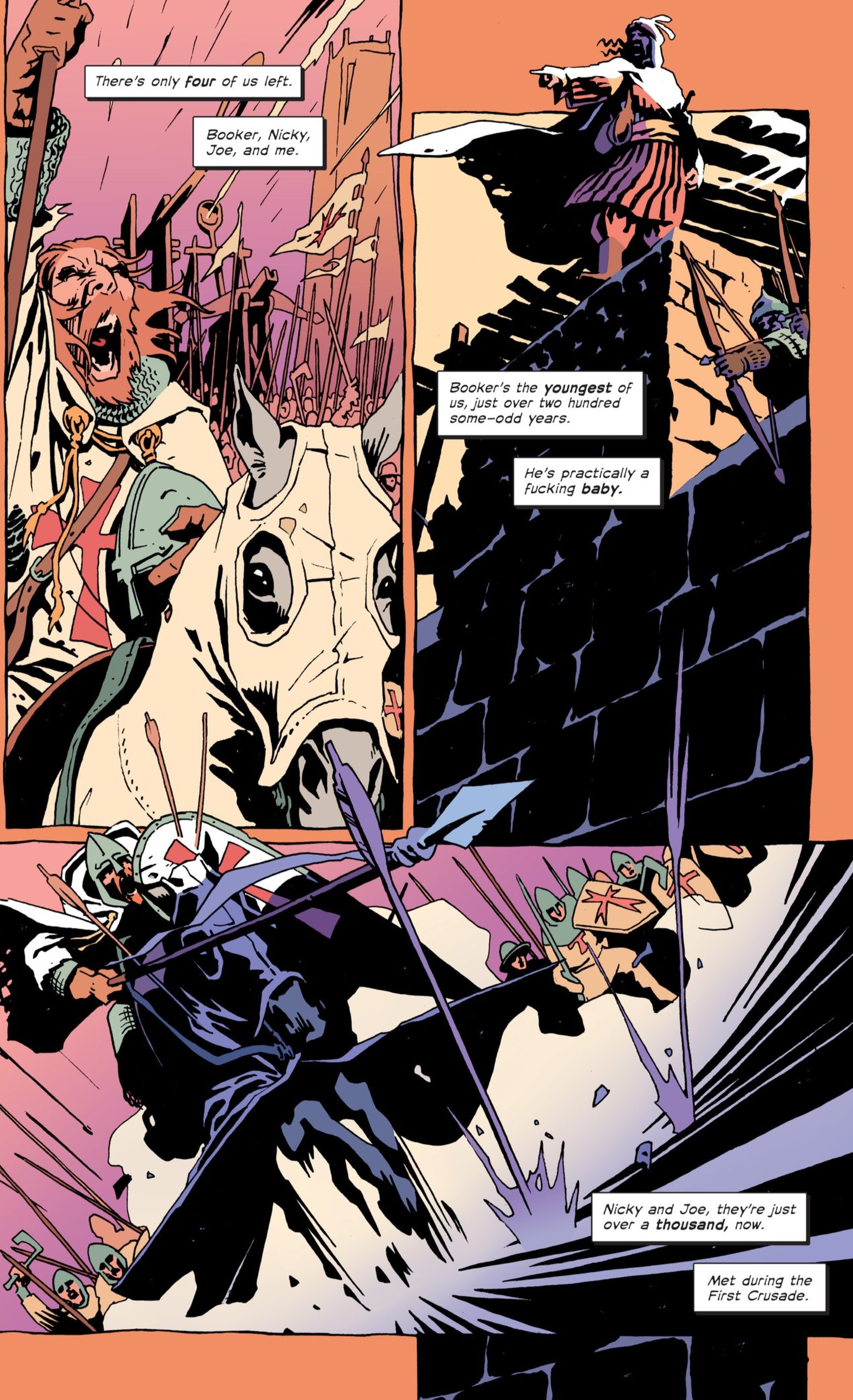
“Old Soldiers never die,

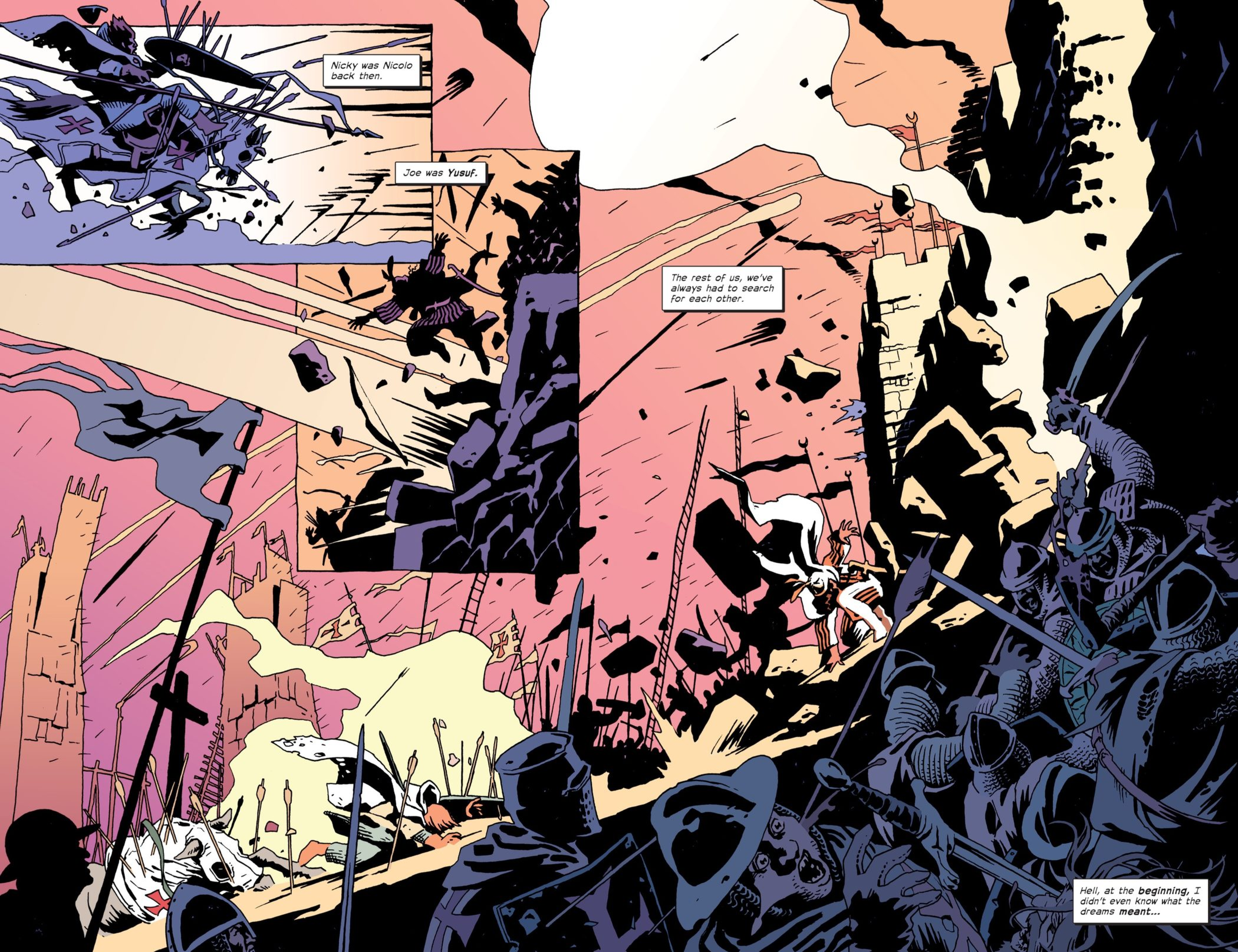
they just Fade Away.”

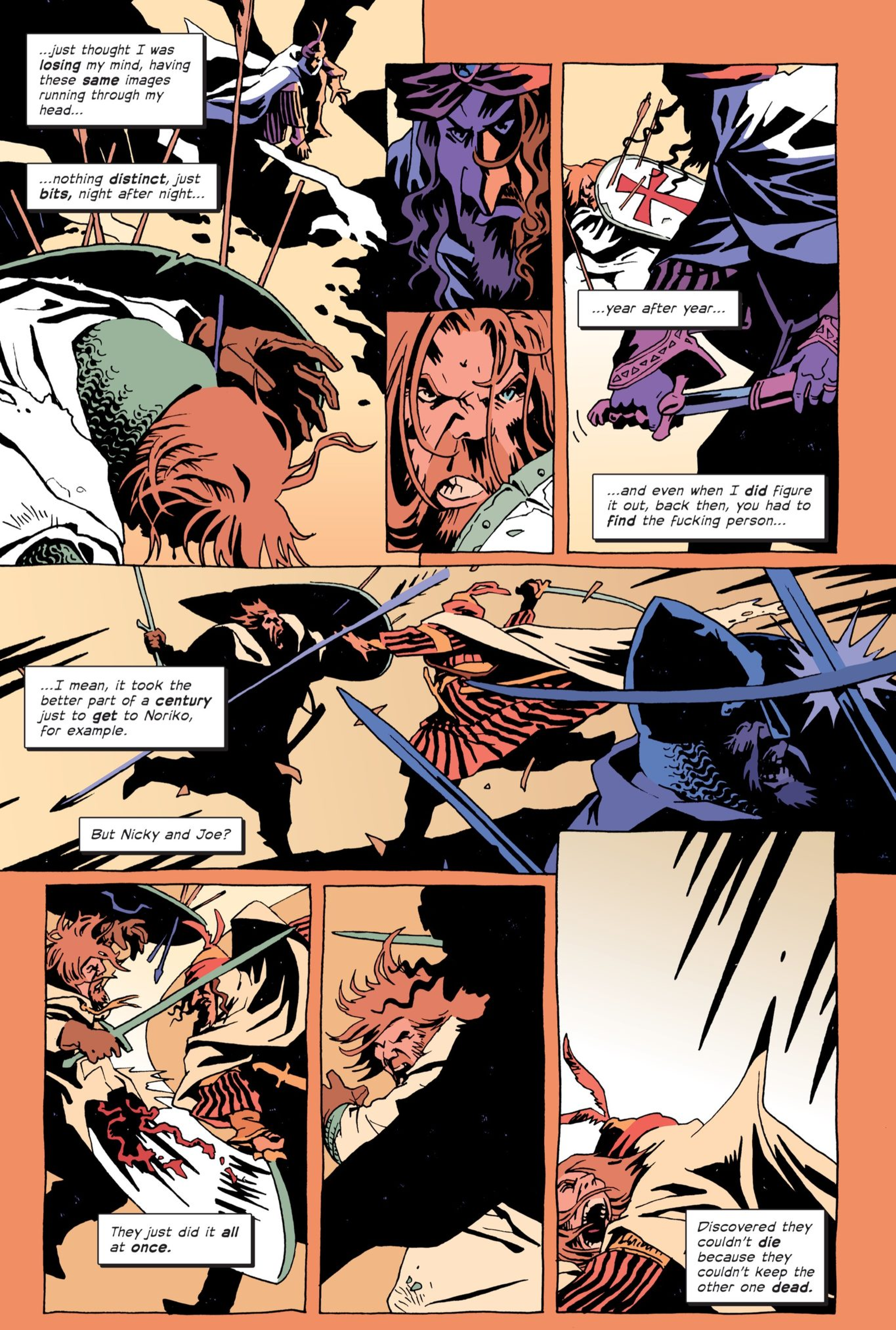
~General Douglas MacArthur, April 19, 1951

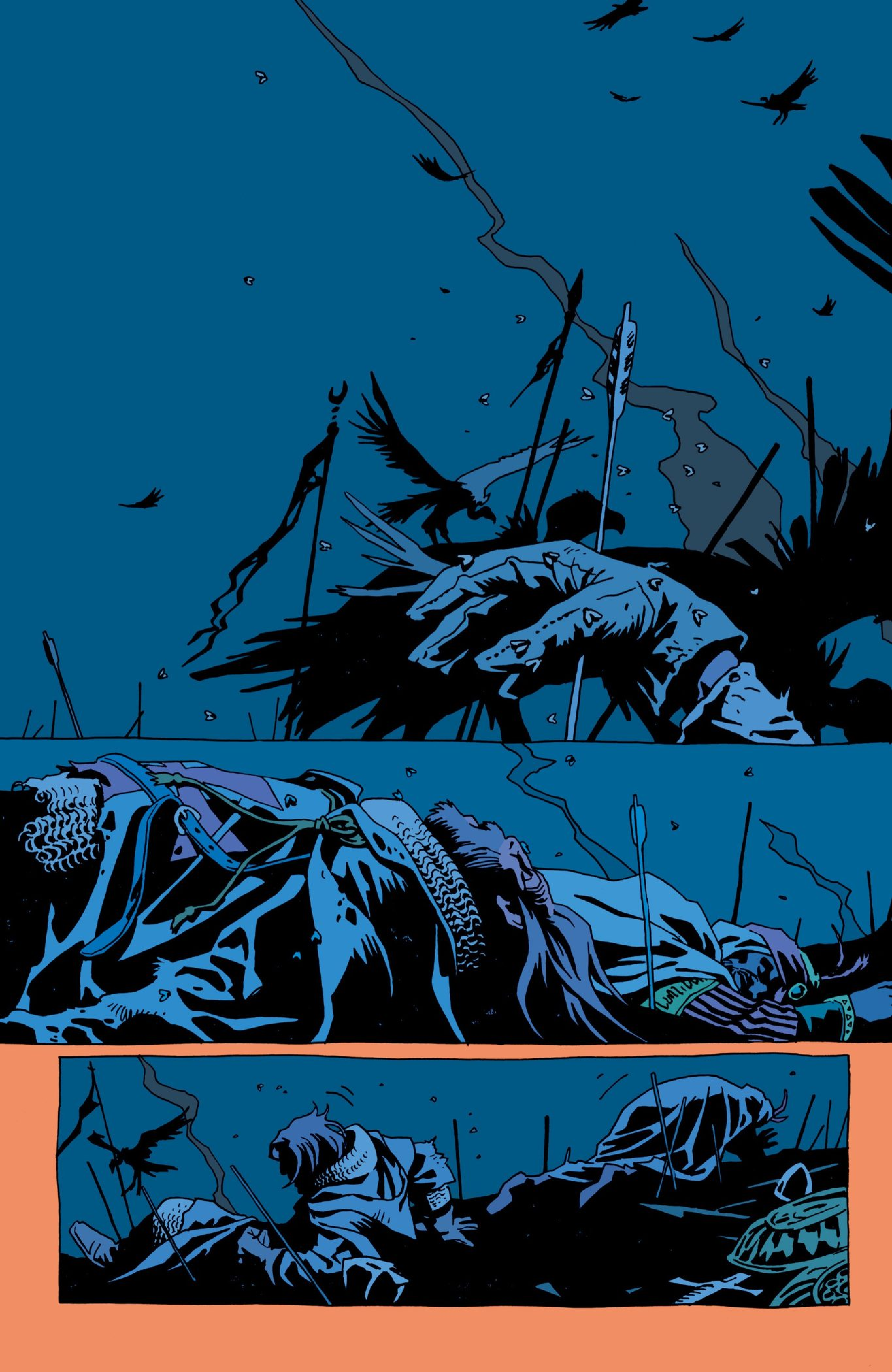

I met Noriko when I was riding with Amir bin al-As against the Byzantine Empire.
I'd been **dreaming** her for years, just didn't know where to **find** her until we rolled into Alexandria and the treaty was signed and there she **was.**
She was **smart** and **fearless** and a fucking **pit viper** in a fight.
Never saw anyone **quicker** than her. Still haven't.
She went **overboard** off the Horn, just never came **up** again.
All of us **knew** that was it for her.

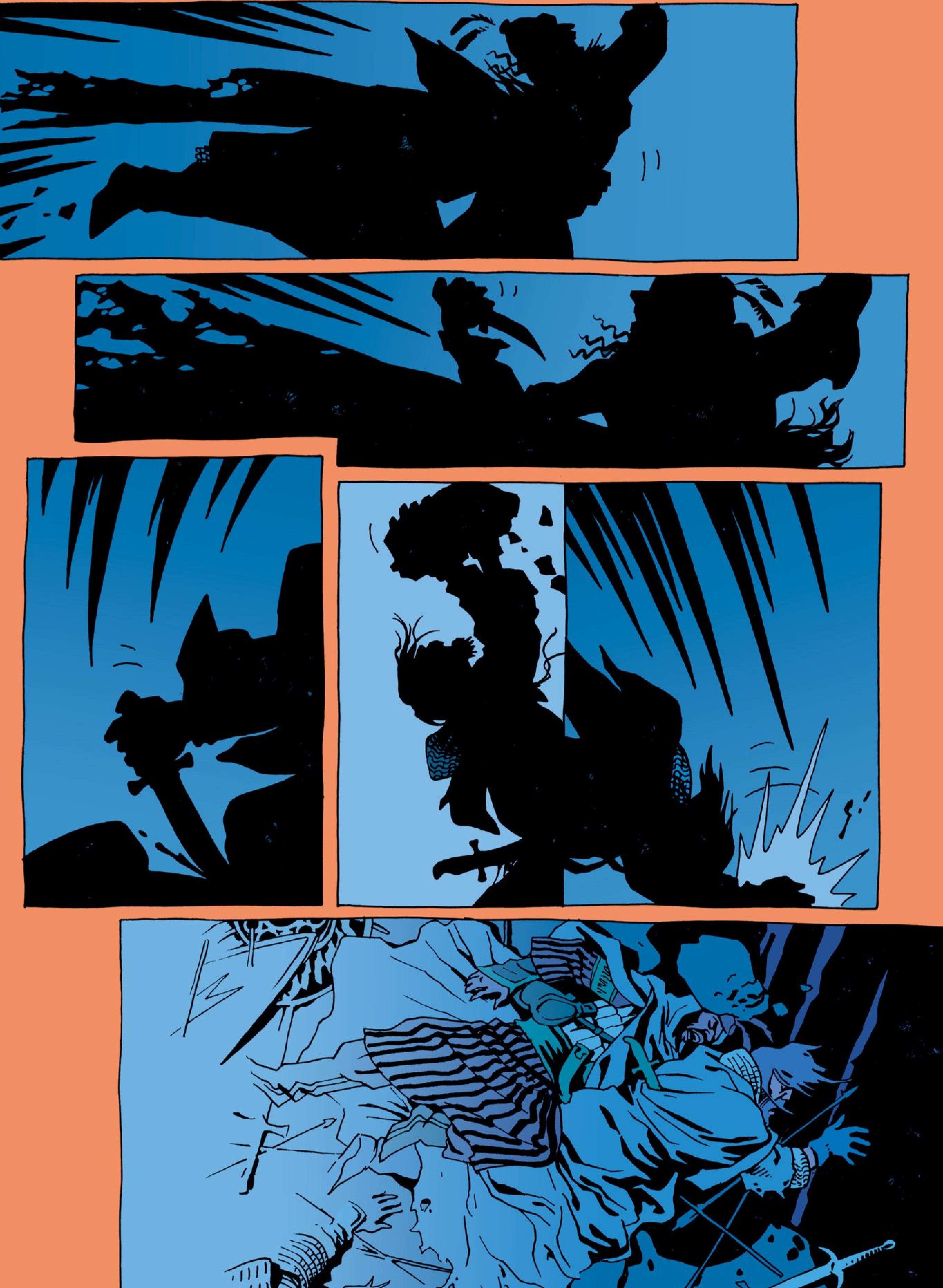

Lykon and I hooked up when Alexander conquered Judea.
*We'd only been dreaming each other a couple of **weeks,** just got **lucky** we were both in pretty much the same place, same time.*
We worked together for almost two thousand years.
*That much time together, you move **past** love and hate, you've got something **else.***
*He went down in one of the city-state wars in what everyone now calls Italy, during what everyone now calls the **Renaissance.***
*I'd seen him wounded so many times by then and he'd hardly notice and this time he went **down** and just didn't get **up** again.*
*He looked so **relieved** it was finally **over.***

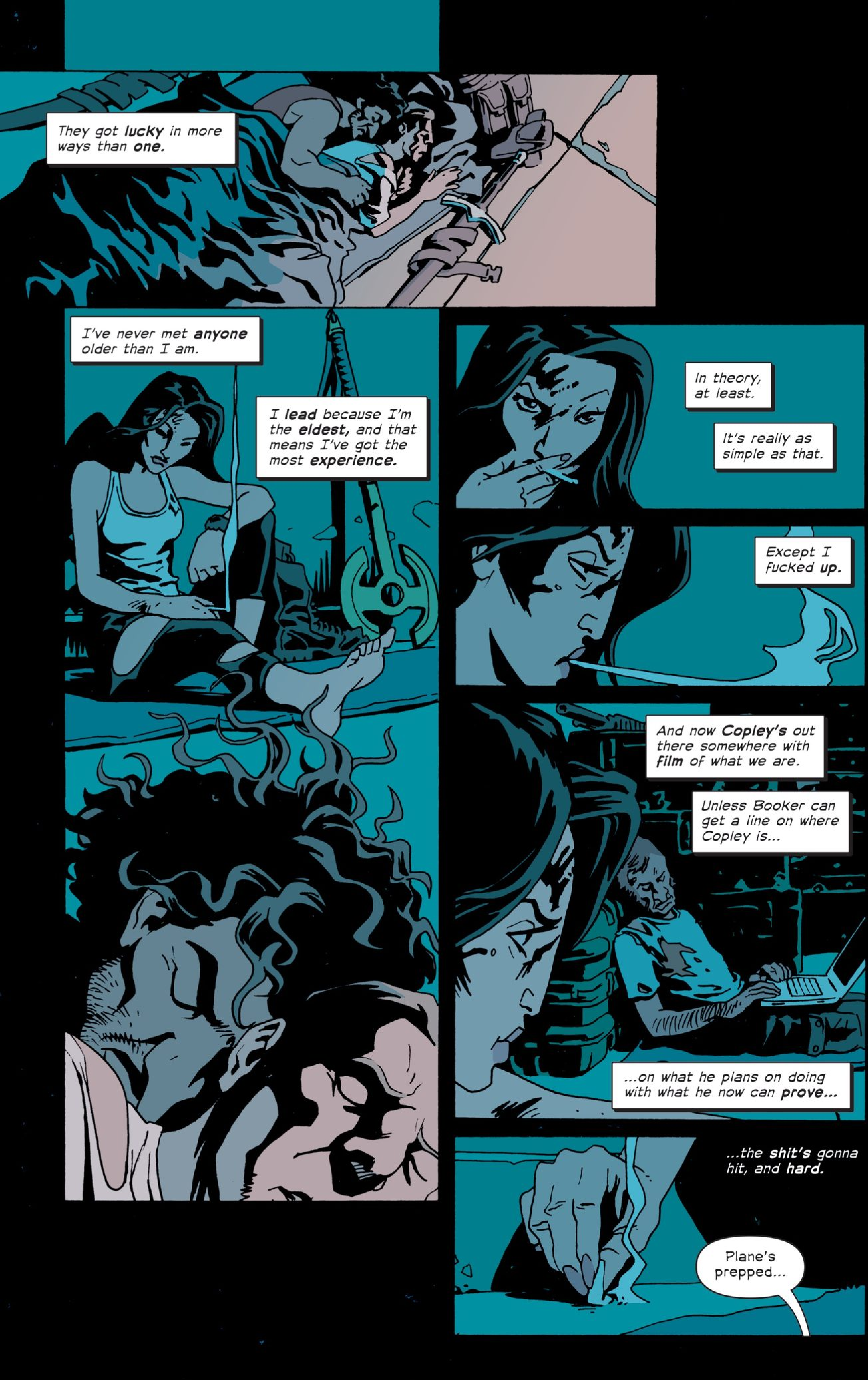

There's only **four** of us left.
Booker, Nicky, Joe, and me.
Booker's the **youngest** of us, just over two hundred some-odd years.
He's practically a fucking **baby.**
Nicky and Joe, they're just over a **thousand,** now.
Met during the First Crusade.

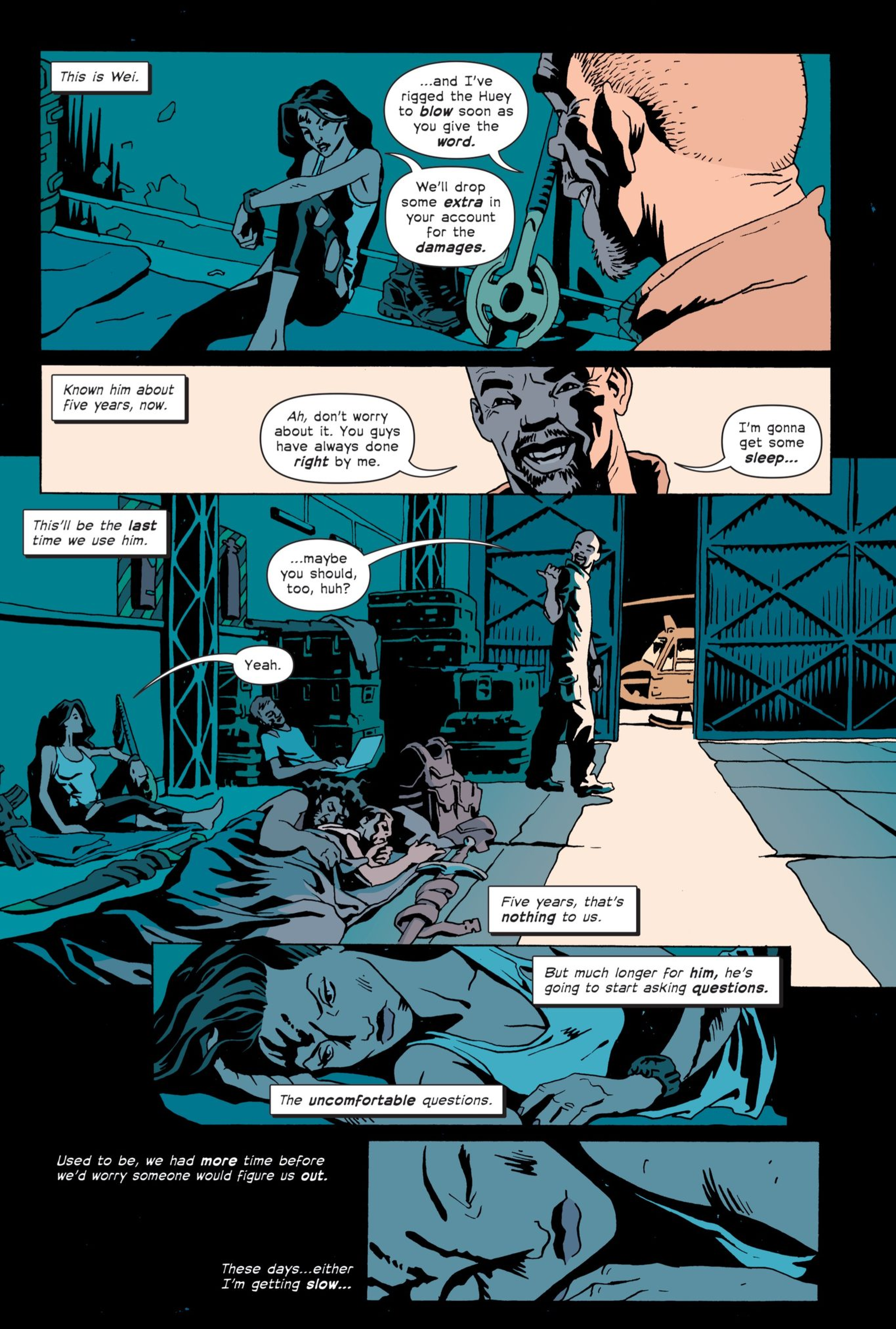

Nicky was Nicolo back then.
Joe was **Yusuf.**
The rest of us, we've always had to search for each other.
Hell, at the **beginning,** I didn't even know what the dreams **meant...**

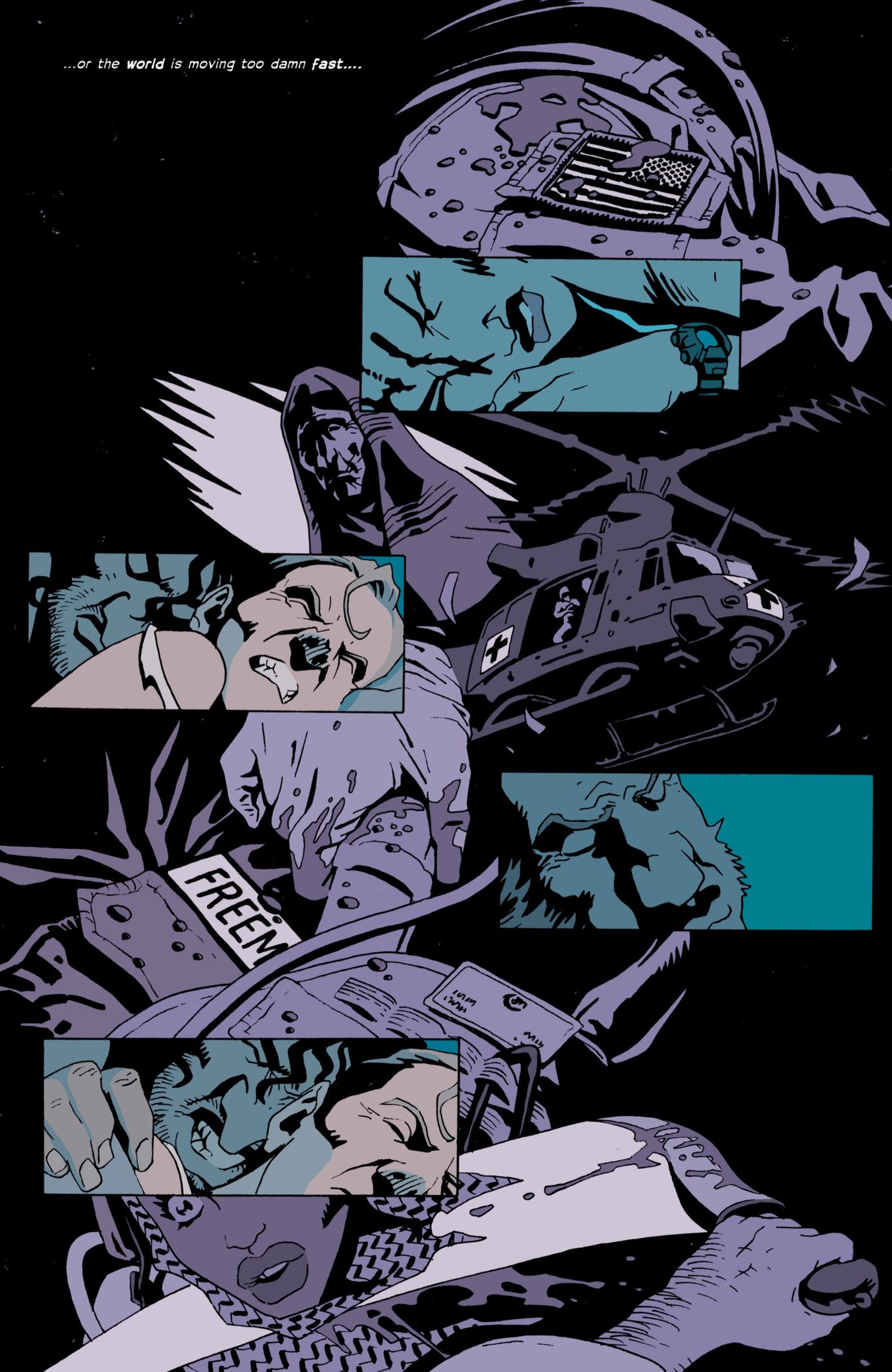

...just thought I was **losing** my mind, having these **same** images running through my head...
...nothing **distinct**, just **bits,** night after night...
...year after year...
...and even when I **did** figure it out, back then, you had to **find** the fucking person...
...I mean, it took the better part of a **century** just to **get** to Noriko, for example.
But Nicky and Joe?
They just did it **all** at **once.**
Discovered they couldn't **die** because they couldn't keep the other one **dead.**

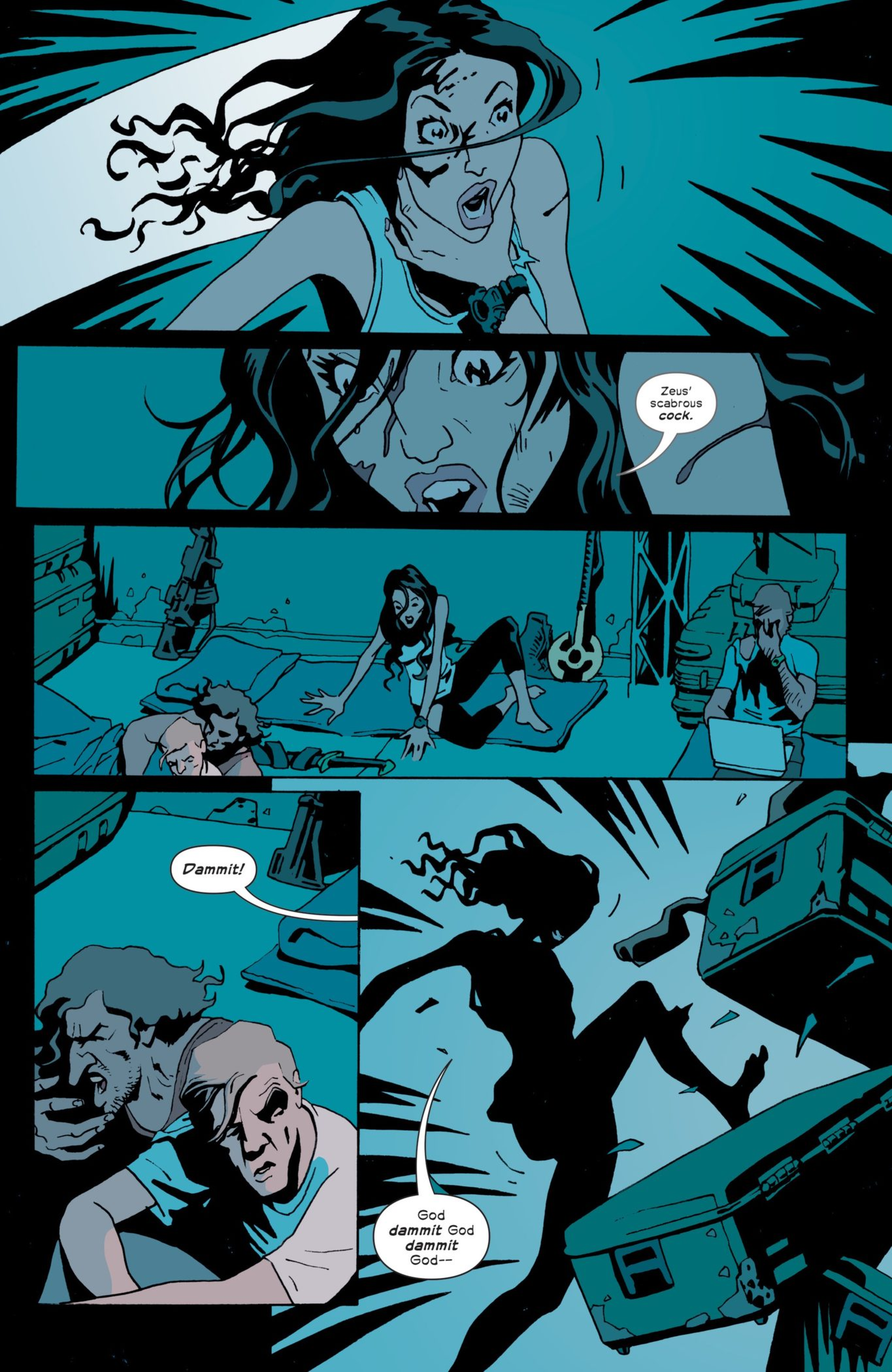


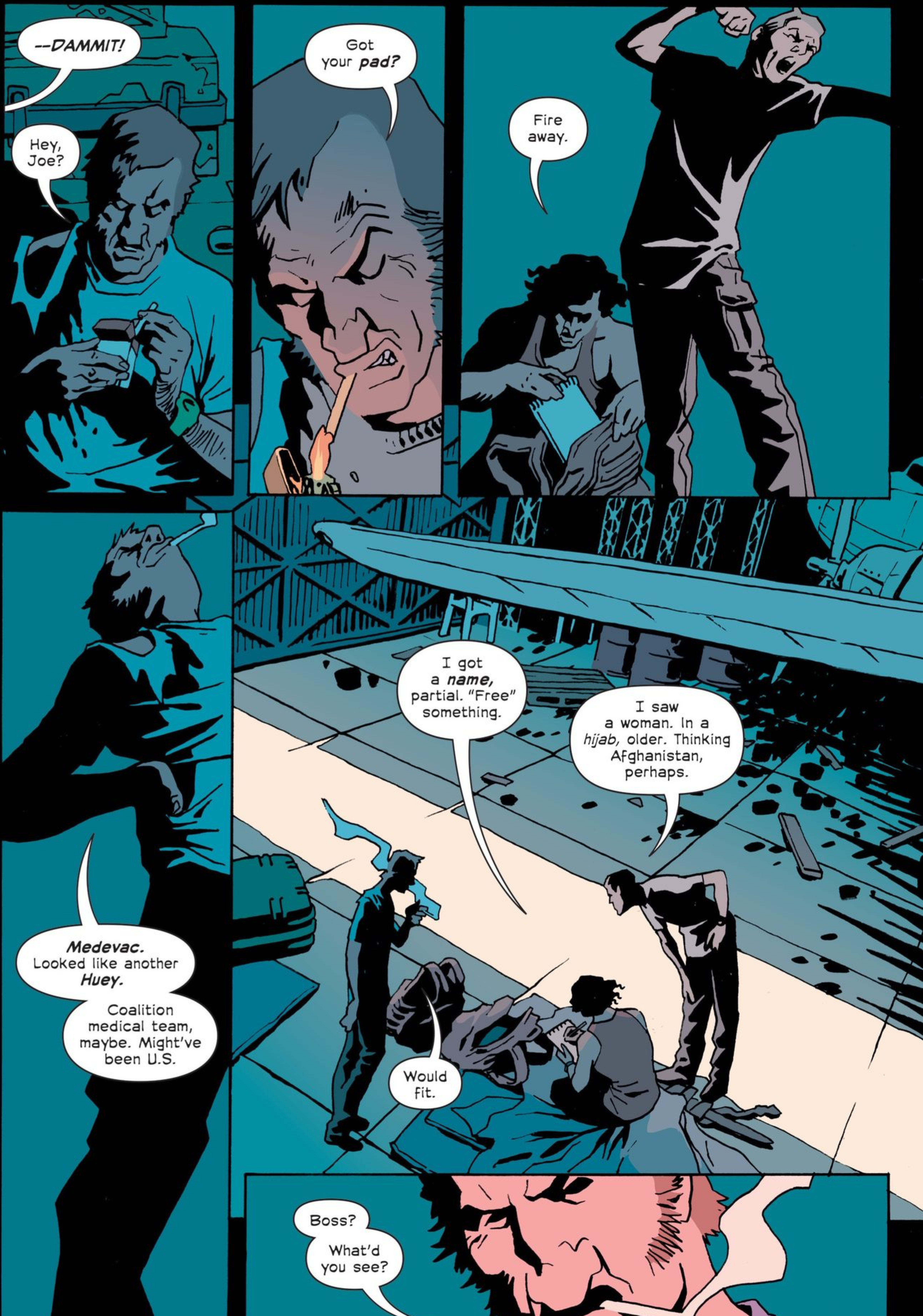


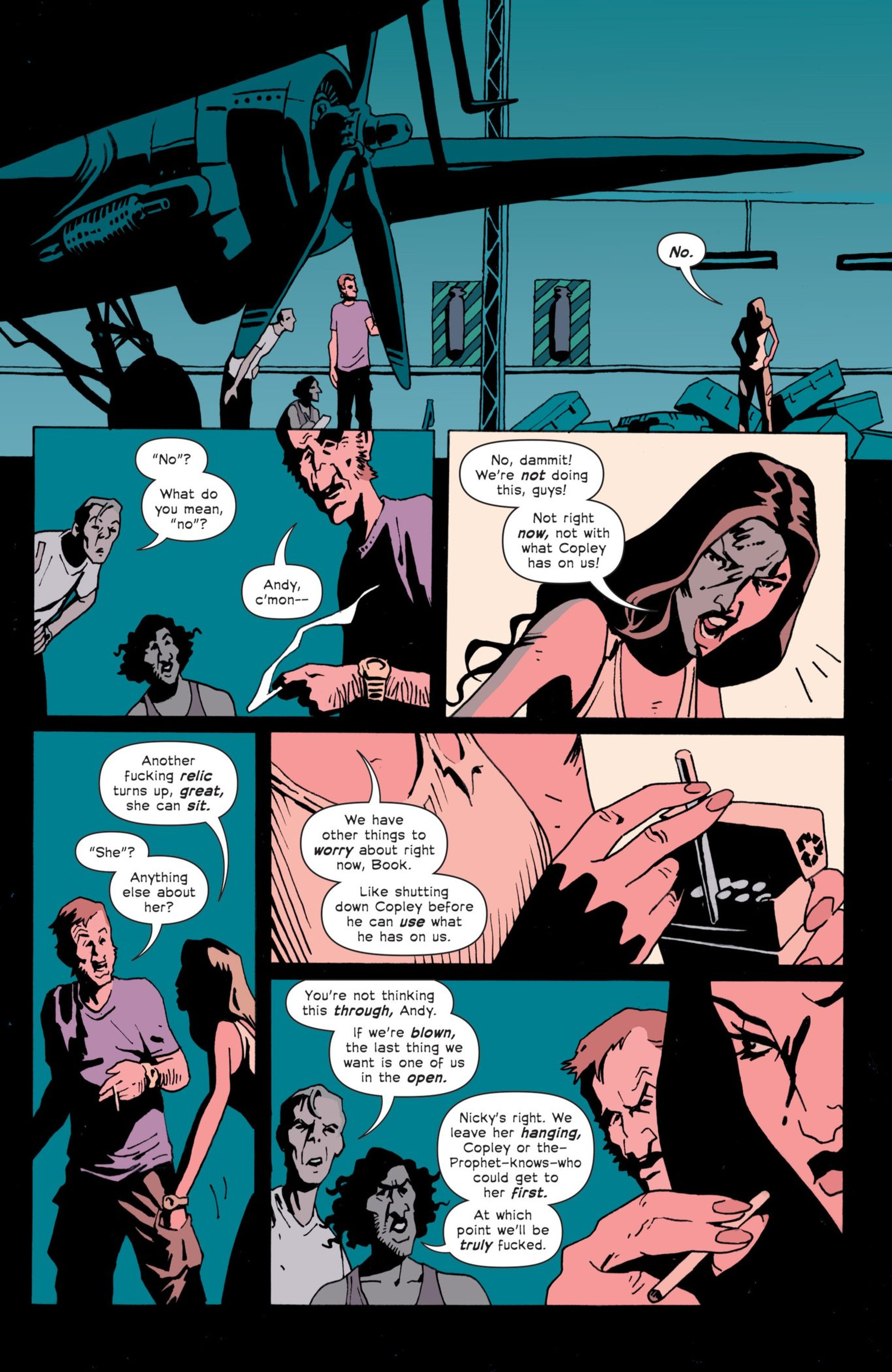

They got **lucky** in more ways than **one.**
I've never met **anyone** older than I am.
I **lead** because I'm the **eldest,** and that means I've got the most **experience.**
In theory, at least.
It's really as simple as that.
Except I fucked **up.**
And now **Copley's** out there somewhere with **film** of what we are.
Unless Booker can get a line on where Copley is...
...on what he plans on doing with what he now can **prove...**
...the **shit's** gonna hit, and **hard.**
Plane's prepped...

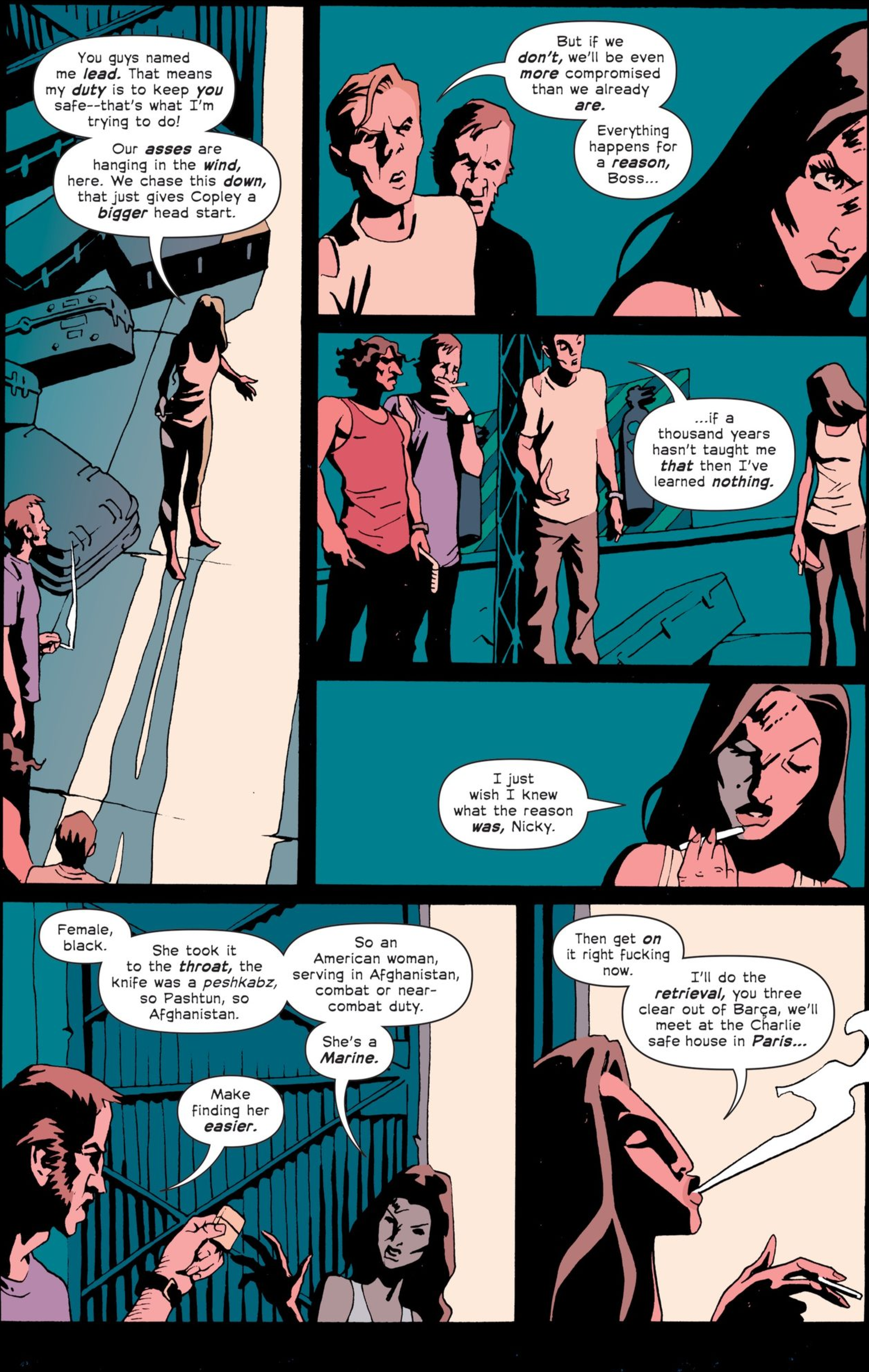

This is Wei.
...and I've rigged the Huey to **blow** soon as you give the **word.**
We'll drop some **extra** in your account for the **damages.**
Known him about five years, now.
Ah, don't worry about it. You guys have always done **right** by me.
I'm gonna get some **sleep...**
This'll be the **last** time we use him.
...maybe you should, too, huh?
Yeah.
Five years, that's **nothing** to us.
But much longer for **him,** he's going to start asking **questions.**
The **uncomfortable** questions.
Used to be, we had **more** time before we'd worry someone would figure us **out.**
These days...either I'm getting **slow...**

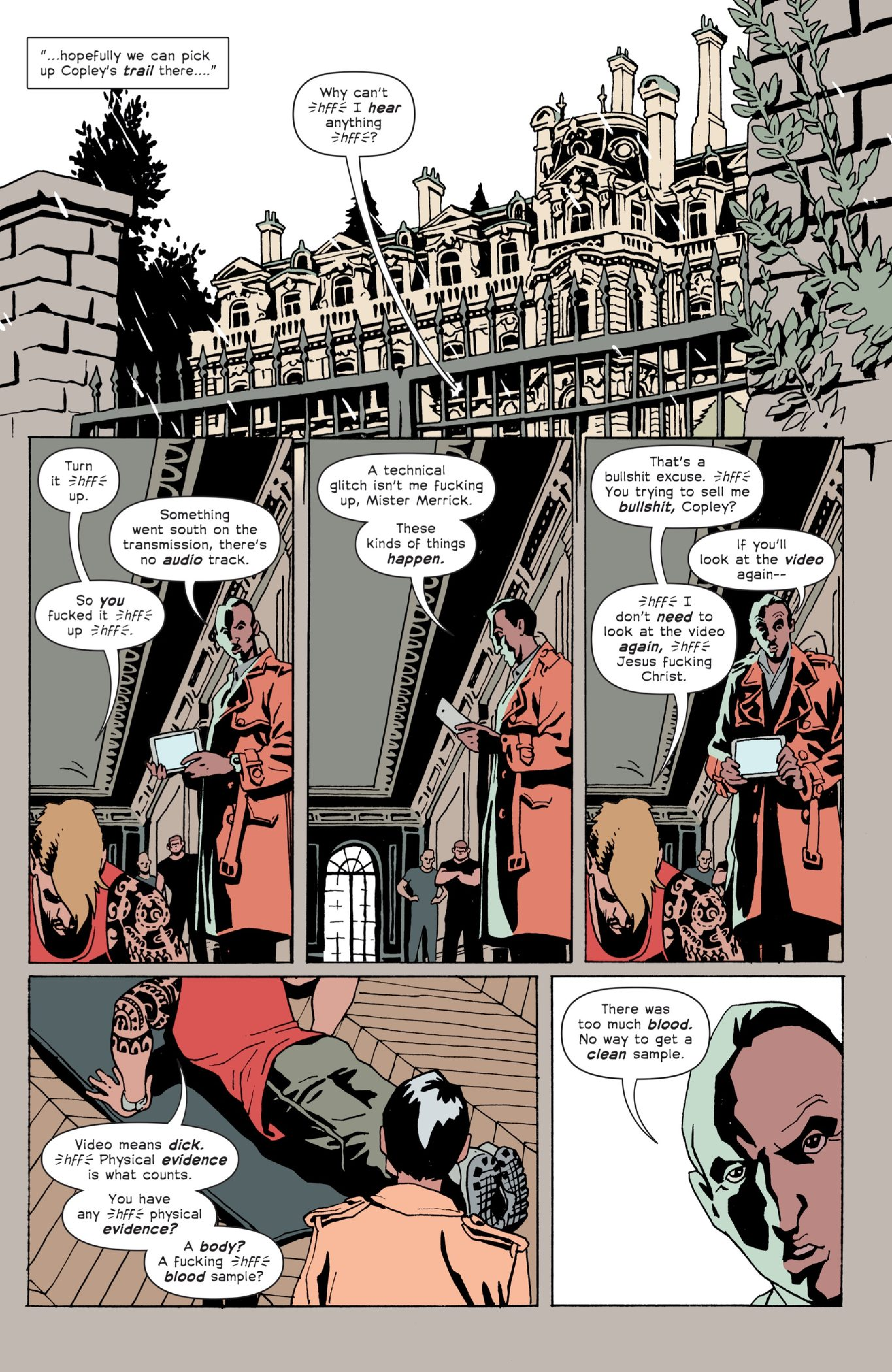

...or the **world** is moving too damn **fast....**
FREEM

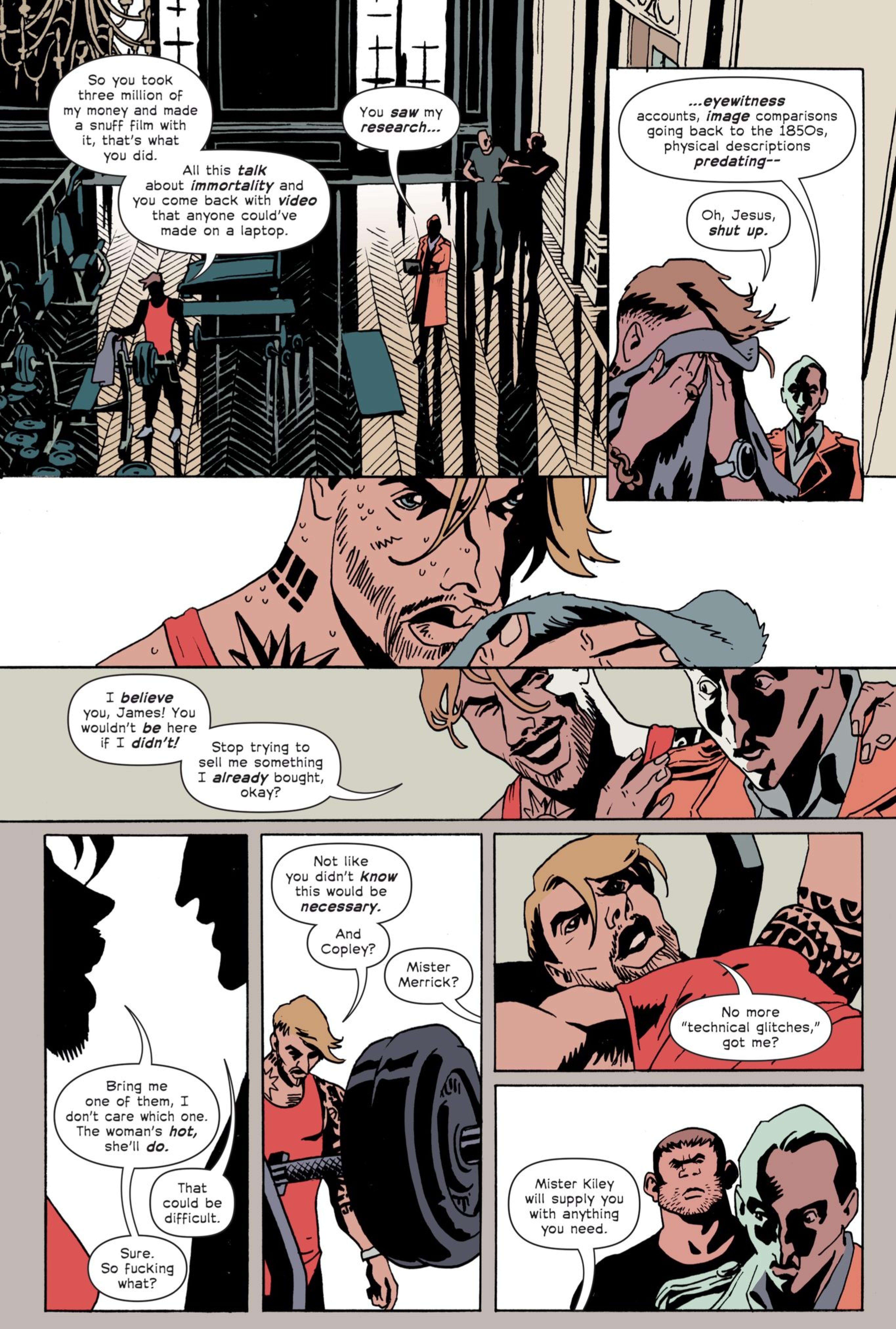

Zeus' scabrous *cock.*
Dammit!
God ***dammit*** God ***dammit*** God--

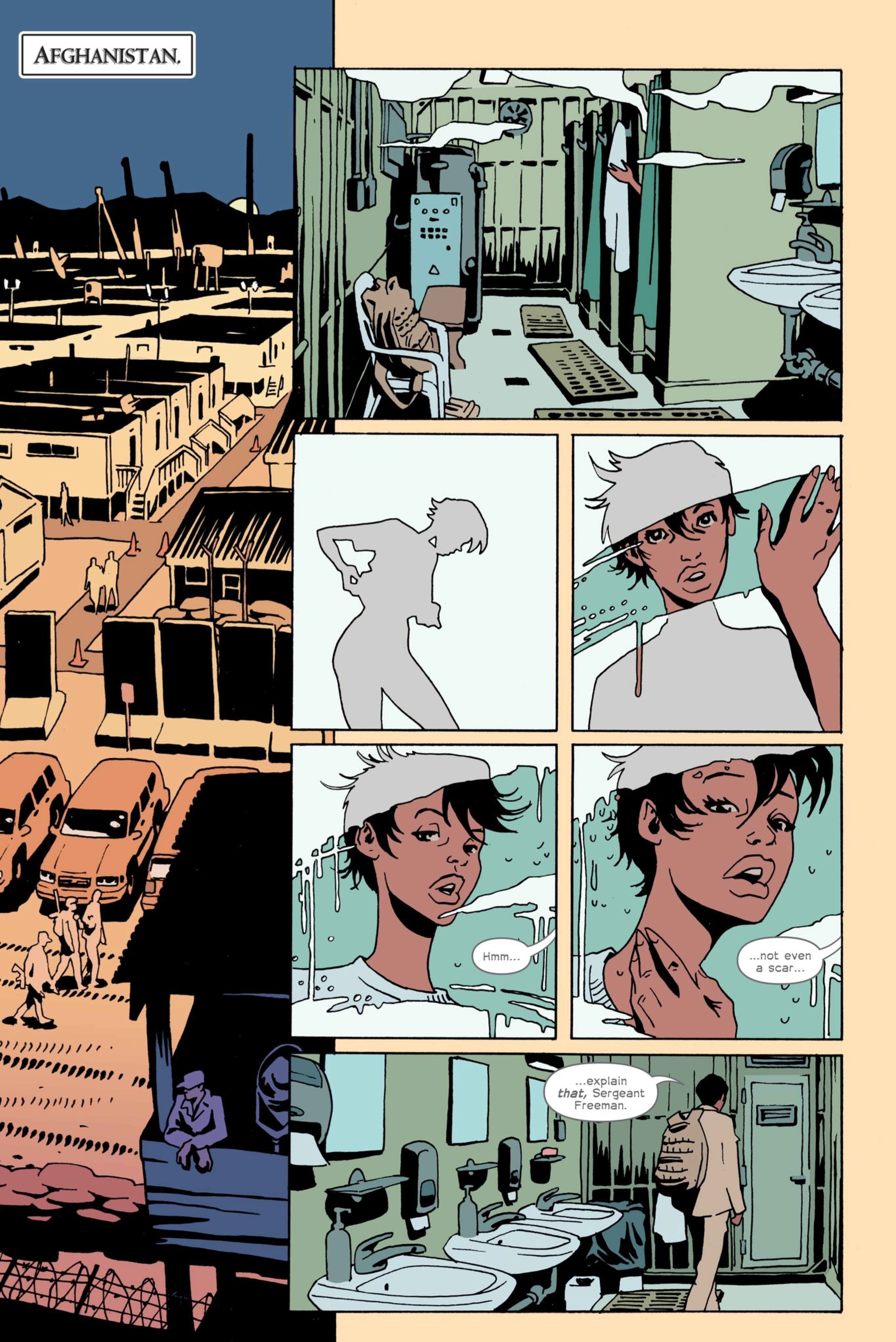

--DAMMIT!
Hey, Joe?
Got your *pad?*
Fire away.
Medevac. Looked like another *Huey.*
Coalition medical team, maybe. Might've been U.S.
I got a *name,* partial. "Free" something.
I saw a woman. In a *hijab,* older. Thinking Afghanistan, perhaps.
Would fit.
Boss?
What'd you see?

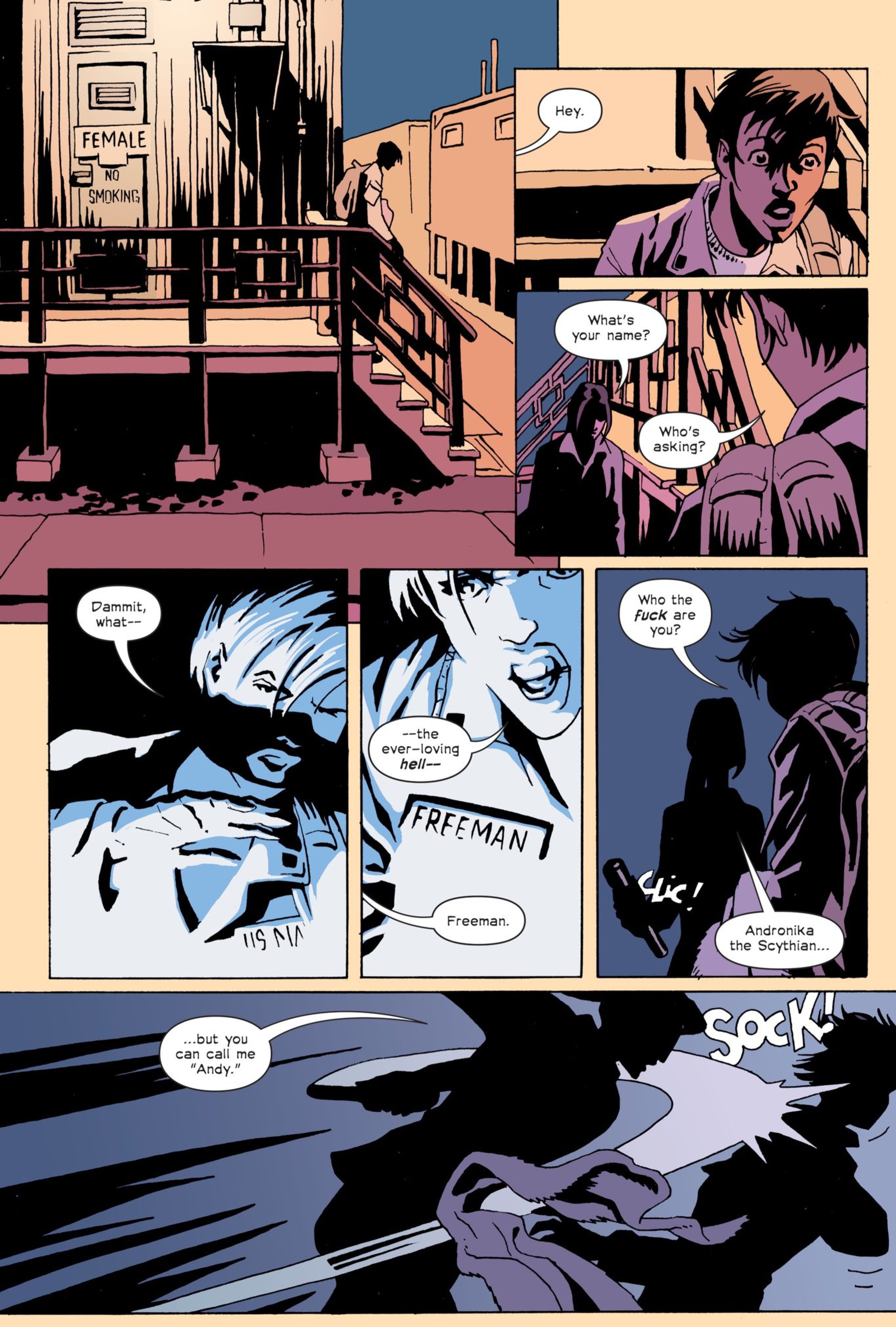

No.
"No"?
What do you mean, "no"?
Andy, c'mon--
No, dammit! We're *not* doing this, guys!
Not right *now,* not with what Copley has on us!
Another fucking *relic* turns up, *great,* she can *sit.*
"She"?
Anything else about her?
We have other things to *worry* about right now, Book.
Like shutting down Copley before he can *use* what he has on us.
You're not thinking this *through,* Andy.
If we're *blown,* the last thing we want is one of us in the *open.*
Nicky's right. We leave her *hanging,* Copley or the-Prophet-knows-who could get to her *first.*
At which point we'll be *truly* fucked.

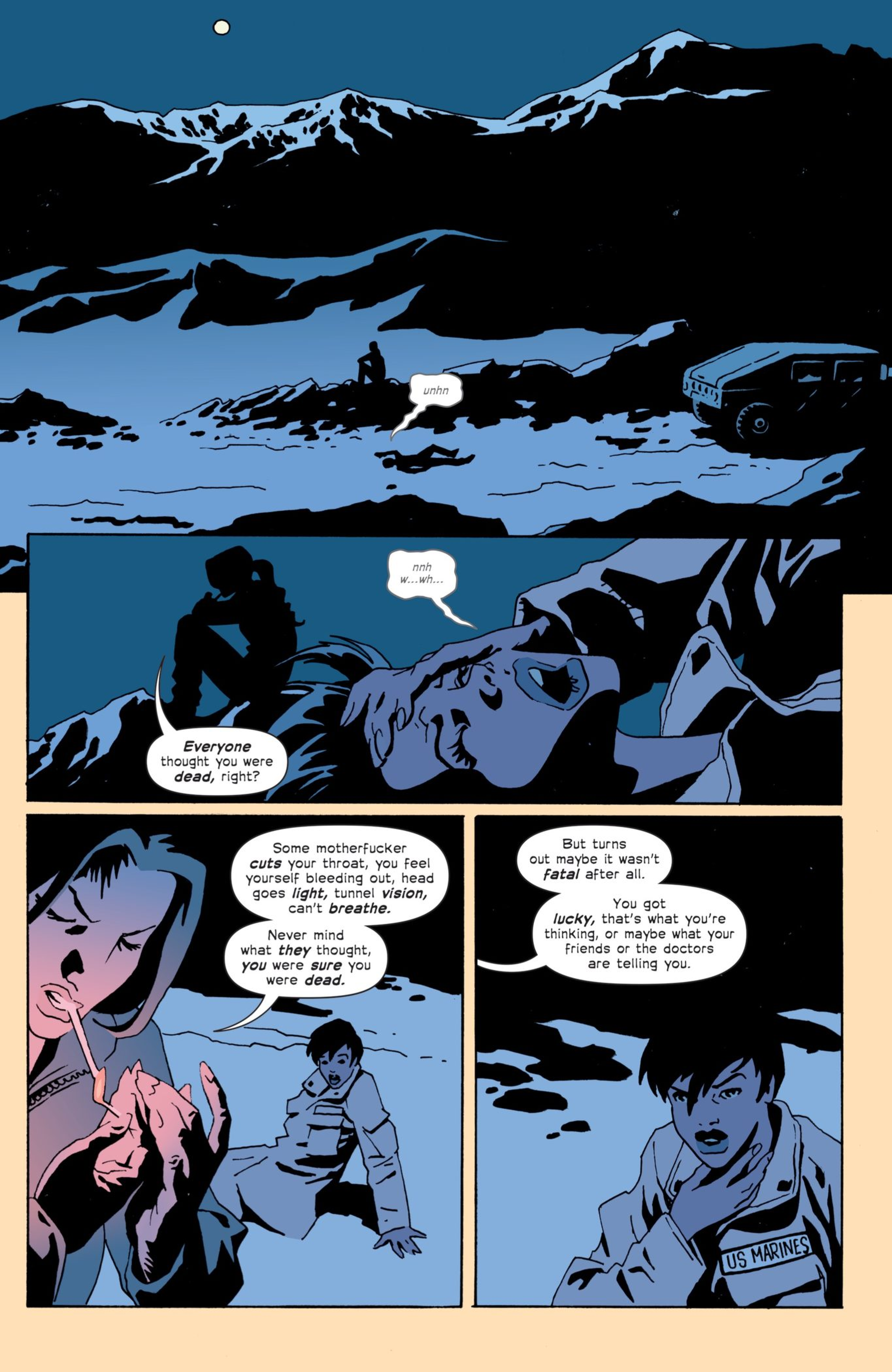

You guys named me **lead.** That means my **duty** is to keep **you** safe--that's what I'm trying to do!
Our **asses** are hanging in the **wind,** here. We chase this **down,** that just gives Copley a **bigger** head start.
But if we **don't,** we'll be even **more** compromised than we already **are.**
Everything happens for a **reason,** Boss...
...if a thousand years hasn't taught me **that** then I've learned **nothing.**
I just wish I knew what the reason **was,** Nicky.
Female, black.
She took it to the **throat,** the knife was a *peshkabz,* so Pashtun, so Afghanistan.
So an American woman, serving in Afghanistan, combat or near-combat duty.
She's a **Marine.**
Make finding her **easier.**
Then get **on** it right fucking now.
I'll do the **retrieval,** you three clear out of Barça, we'll meet at the Charlie safe house in **Paris...**

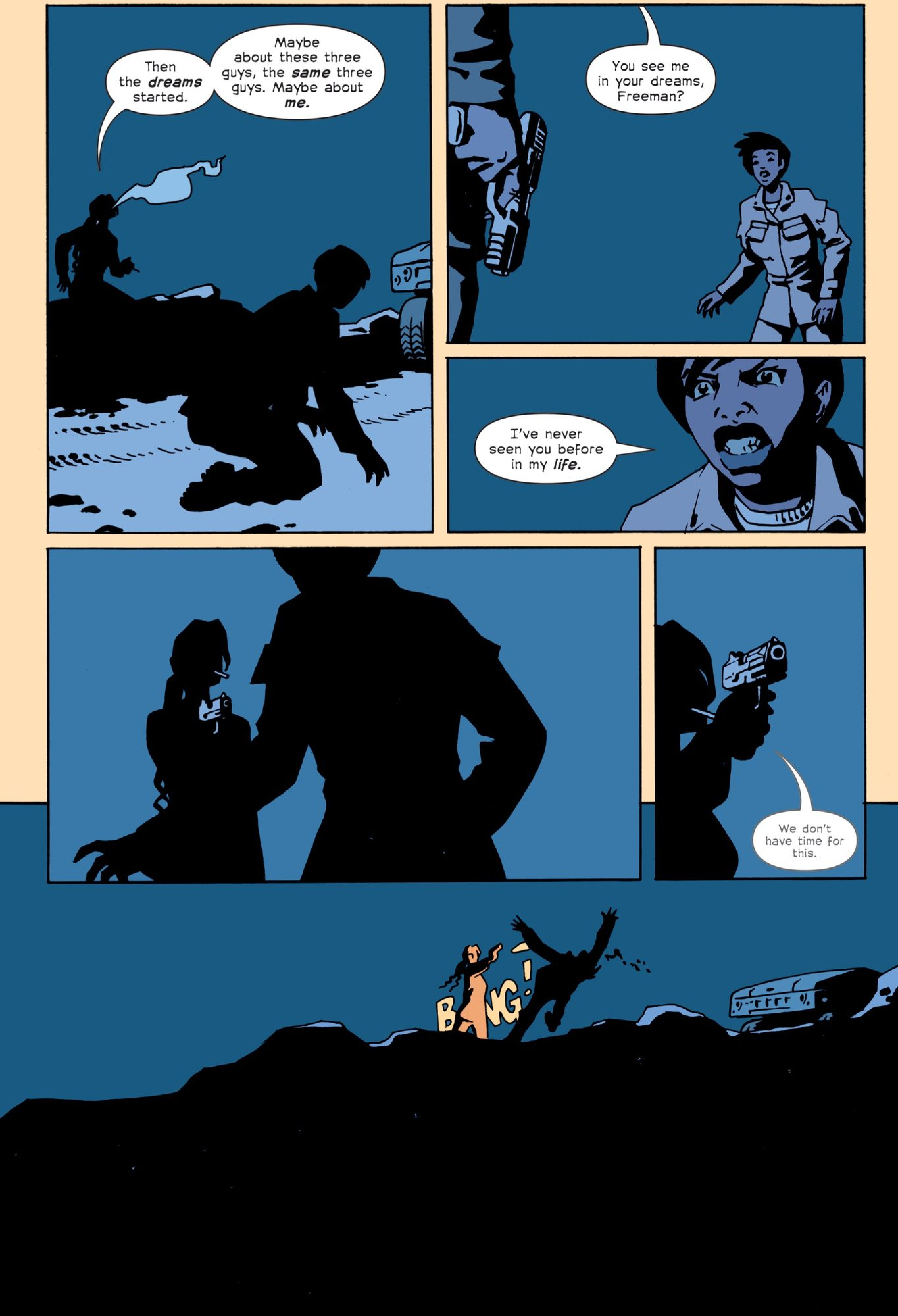

"...hopefully we can pick up Copley's *trail* there...."
Why can't *hff* I ***hear*** anything *hff*?
Turn it *hff* up.
Something went south on the transmission, there's no ***audio*** track.
So ***you*** fucked it *hff* up *hff*.
A technical glitch isn't me fucking up, Mister Merrick.
These kinds of things ***happen.***
That's a bullshit excuse. *hff* You trying to sell me ***bullshit,*** Copley?
If you'll look at the ***video*** again--
hff I don't ***need*** to look at the video ***again,*** *hff* Jesus fucking Christ.
Video means ***dick.*** *hff* Physical ***evidence*** is what counts.
You have any *hff* physical ***evidence?***
A ***body?*** A fucking *hff* ***blood*** sample?
There was too much ***blood.*** No way to get a ***clean*** sample.

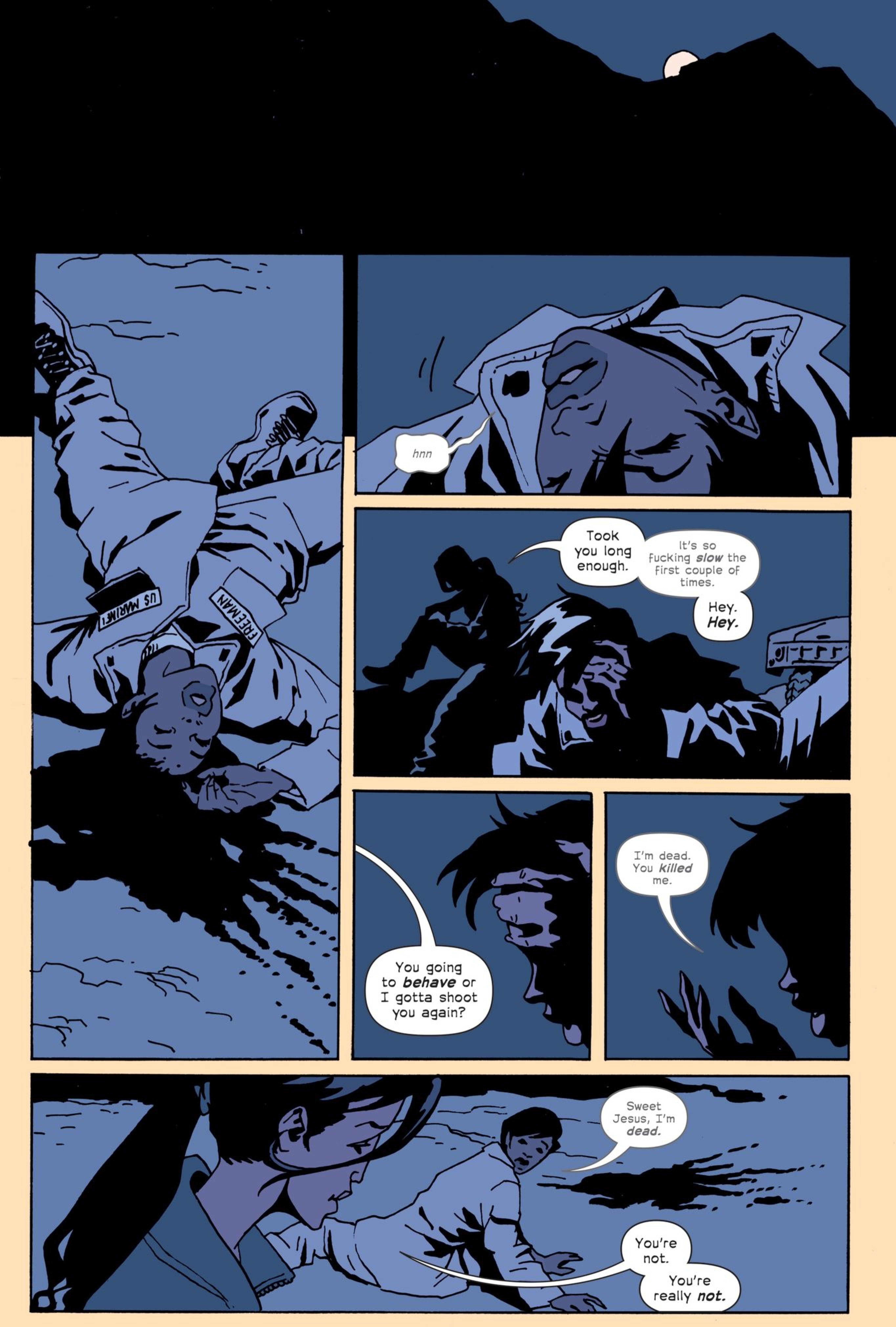

So you took three million of my money and made a snuff film with it, that's what you did.
All this *talk* about *immortality* and you come back with *video* that anyone could've made on a laptop.
You *saw* my *research...*
...eyewitness accounts, *image* comparisons going back to the 1850s, physical descriptions *predating--*
Oh, Jesus, *shut up.*
I *believe* you, James! You wouldn't *be* here if I *didn't!*
Stop trying to sell me something I *already* bought, okay?
Bring me one of them, I don't care which one. The woman's *hot,* she'll *do.*
That could be difficult.
Sure. So fucking what?
Not like you didn't *know* this would be *necessary.*
And Copley?
Mister Merrick?
No more "technical glitches," got me?
Mister Kiley will supply you with anything you need.

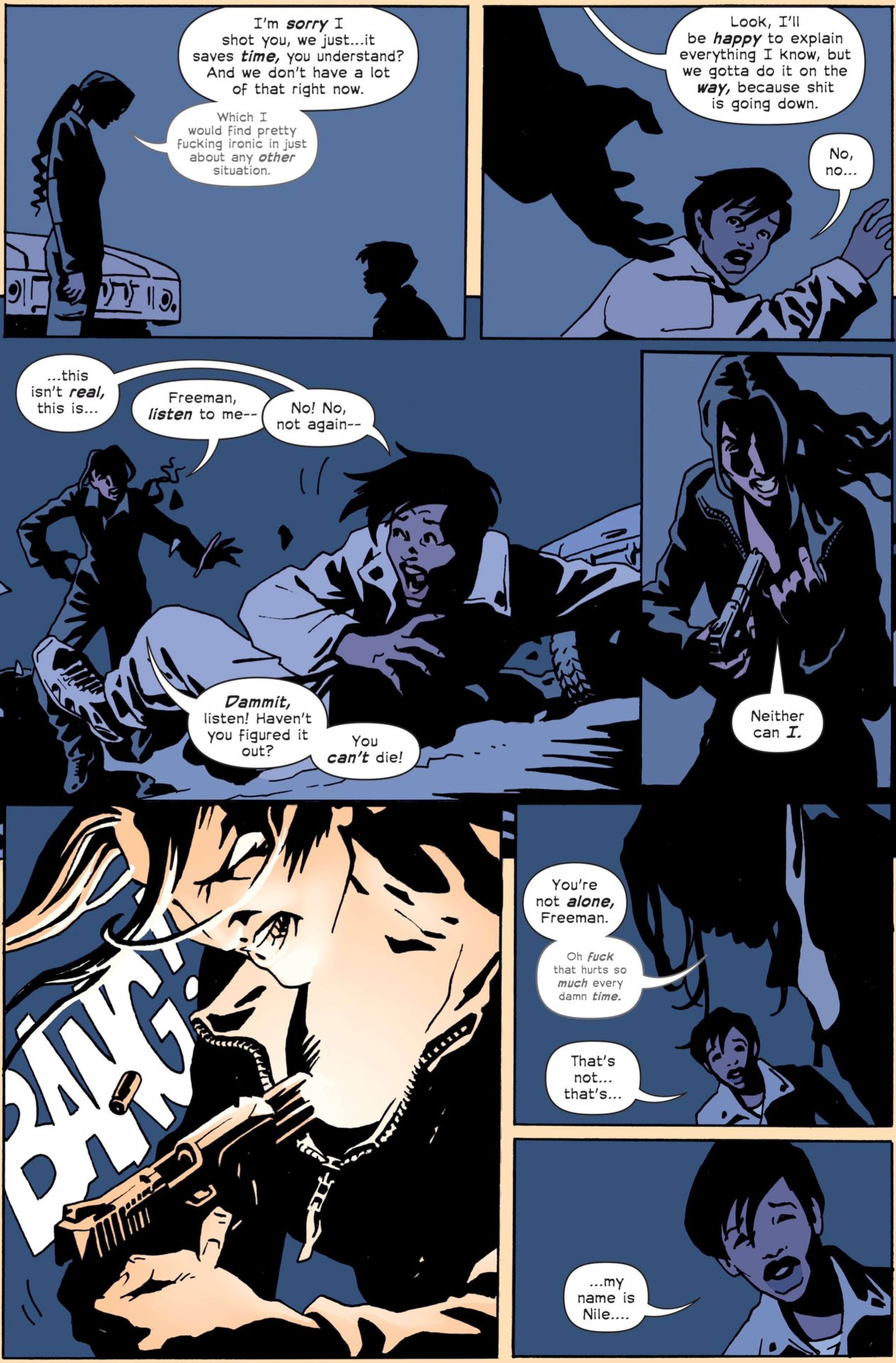

AFGHANISTAN.
Hmm...
...not even a scar...
...explain *that,* Sergeant Freeman.

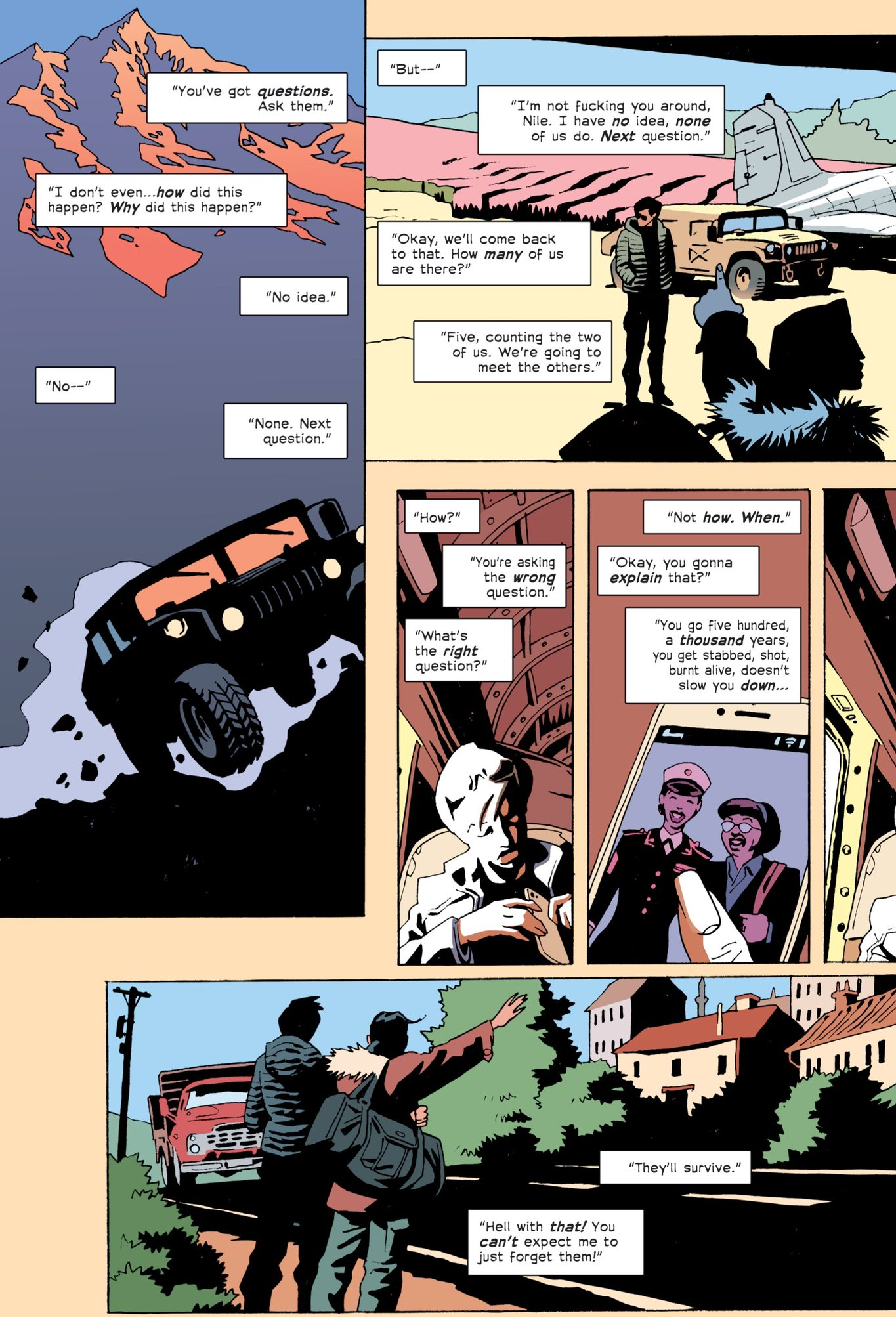

FEMALE
NO SMOKING
Hey.
What's your name?
Who's asking?
Dammit, what--
--the ever-loving *hell--*
FREEMAN
US NA
Freeman.
Who the *fuck* are you?
CLIC!
Andronika the Scythian...
...but you can call me "Andy."
SOCK!

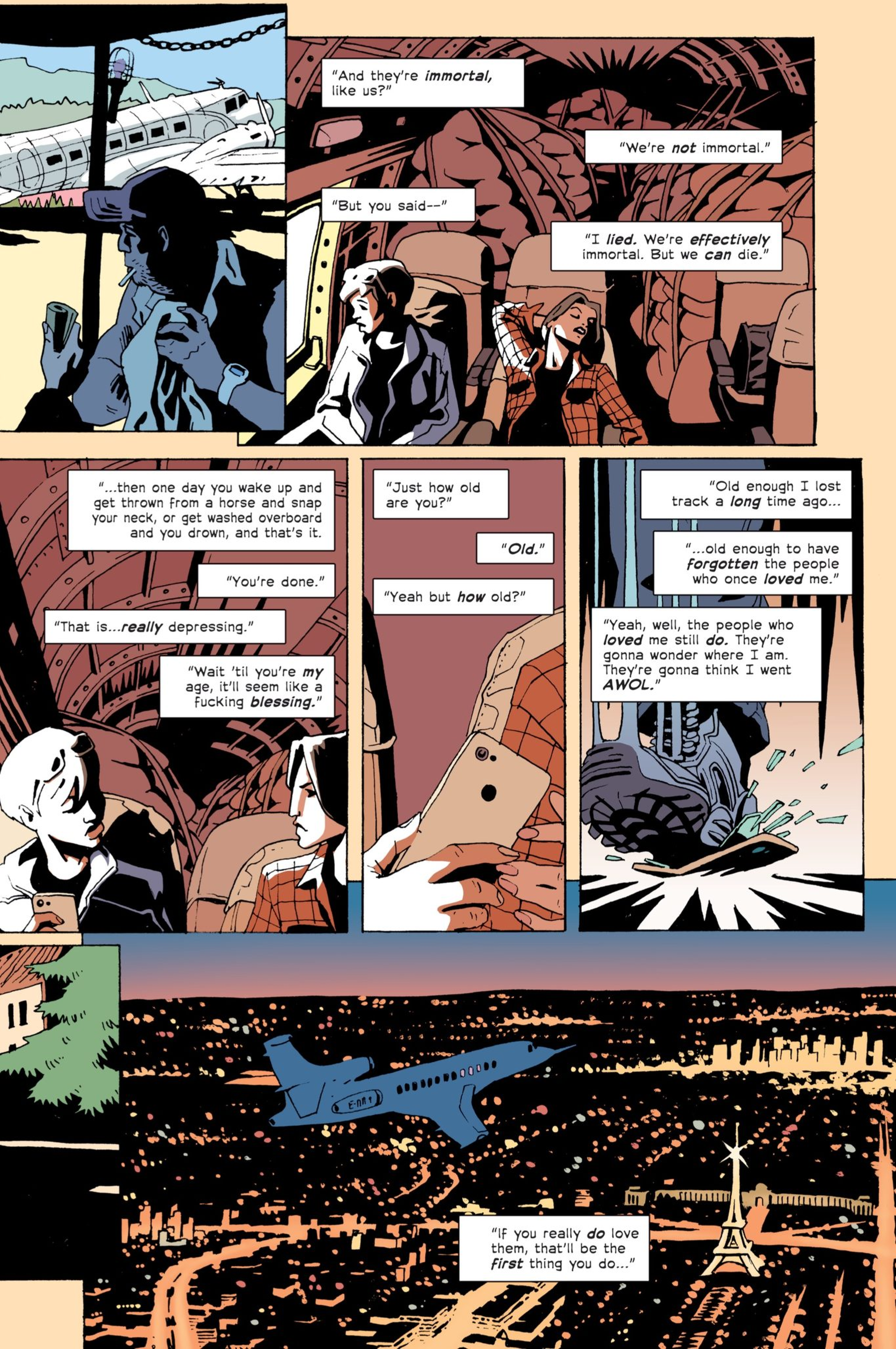

unhn
nnh w...wh...
Everyone thought you were dead, right?
Some motherfucker cuts your throat, you feel yourself bleeding out, head goes light, tunnel vision, can't breathe.
Never mind what they thought, you were sure you were dead.
But turns out maybe it wasn't fatal after all.
You got lucky, that's what you're thinking, or maybe what your friends or the doctors are telling you.
US MARINES

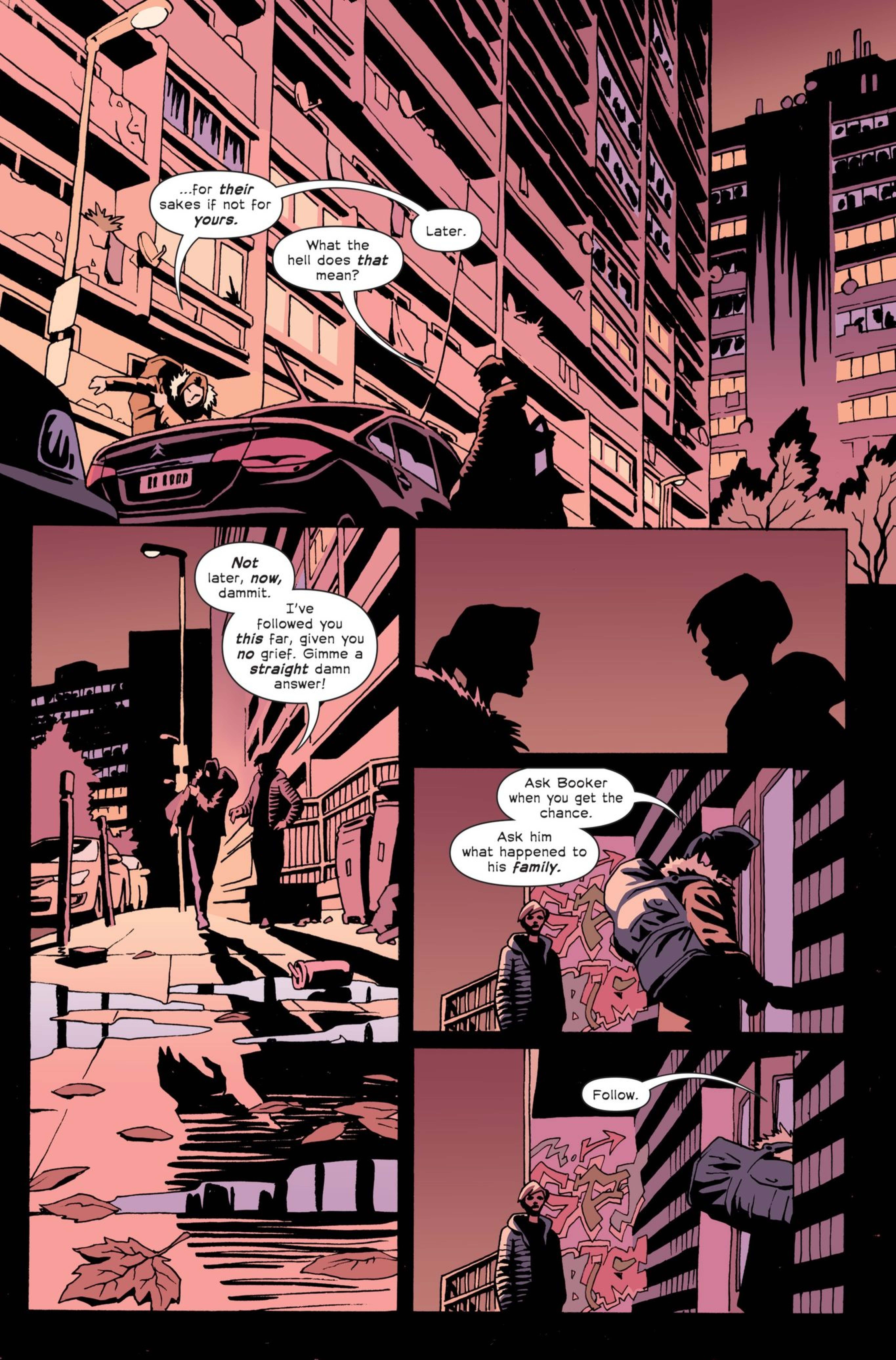

Then the *dreams* started.
Maybe about these three guys, the *same* three guys. Maybe about *me.*
You see me in your dreams, Freeman?
I've never seen you before in my *life.*
We don't have time for this.
BANG!

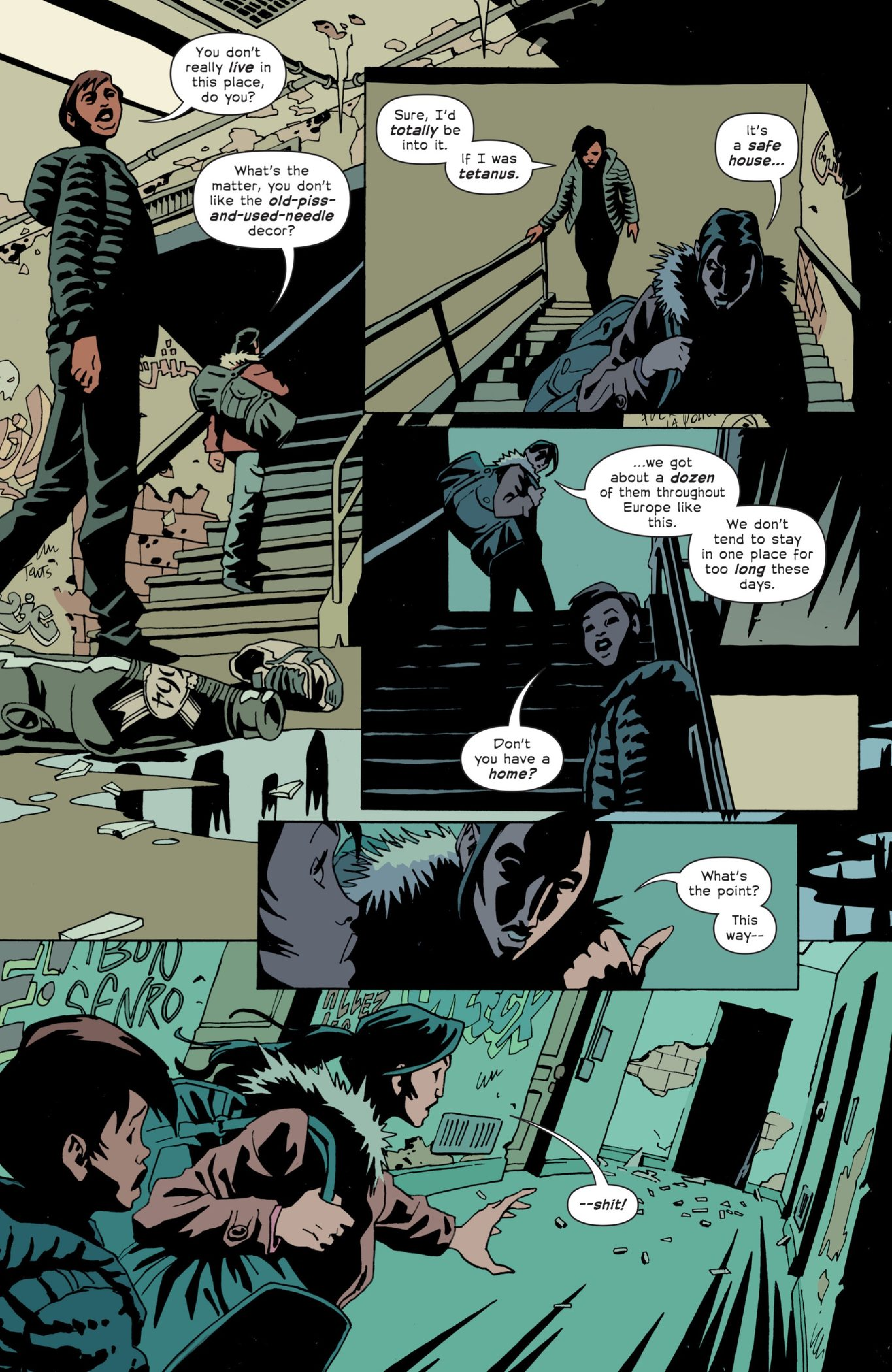

US MARINE
FREEMAN
hnn
Took you long enough.
It's so fucking *slow* the first couple of times.
Hey. **Hey.**
You going to ***behave*** or I gotta shoot you again?
I'm dead. You *killed* me.
Sweet Jesus, I'm *dead.*
You're not.
You're really ***not.***

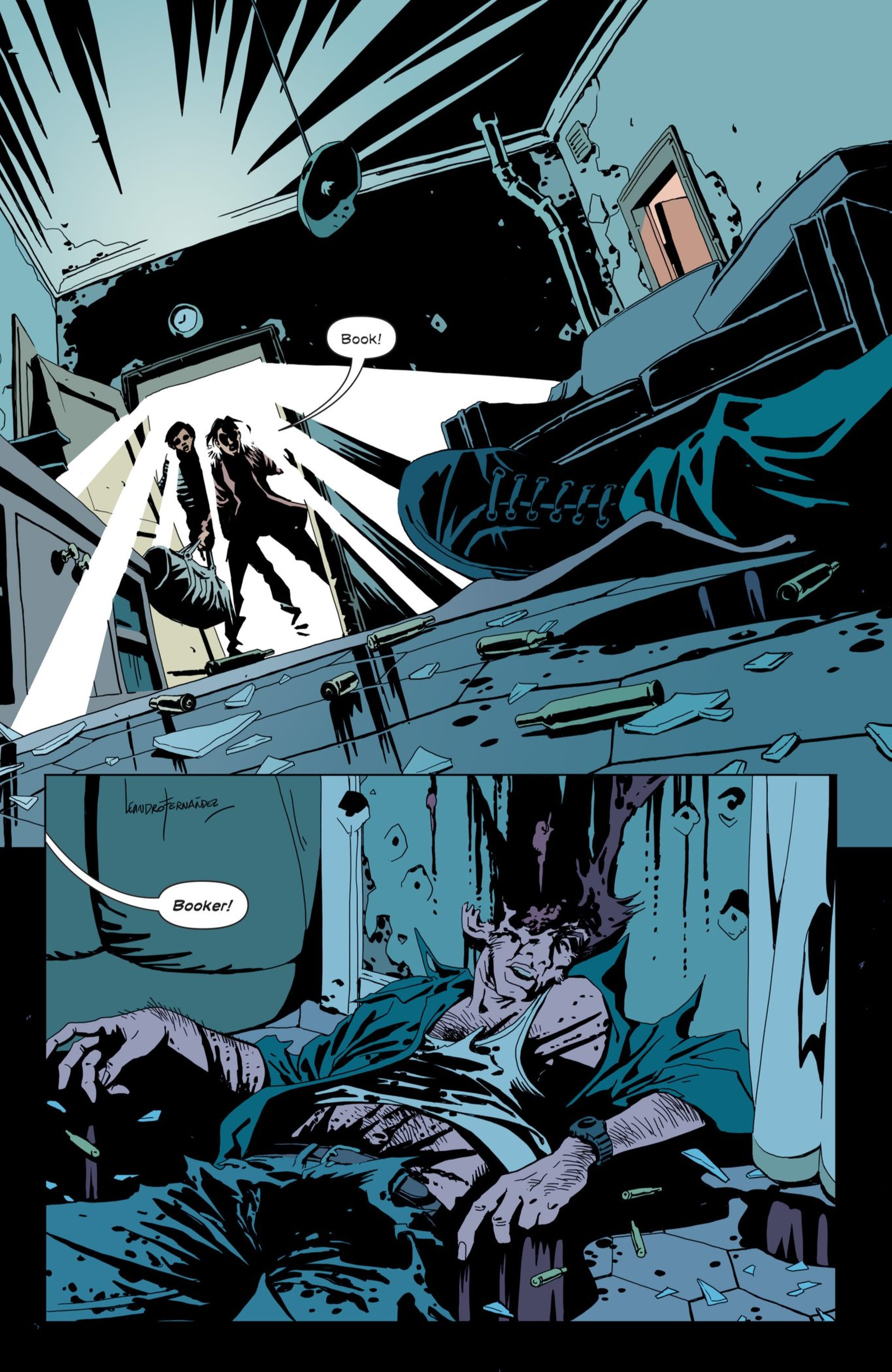

I'm *sorry* I shot you, we just...it saves *time,* you understand? And we don't have a lot of that right now.
Which I would find pretty fucking ironic in just about any *other* situation.
Look, I'll be *happy* to explain everything I know, but we gotta do it on the *way,* because shit is going down.
No, no...
...this isn't *real,* this is...
Freeman, *listen* to me--
No! No, not again--
Dammit, listen! Haven't you figured it out?
You *can't* die!
Neither can *I.*
BANG!
You're not *alone,* Freeman.
Oh *fuck* that hurts so *much* every damn *time.*
That's not... that's...
...my name is Nile....


"You've got *questions.* Ask them."
"I don't even...*how* did this happen? *Why* did this happen?"
"No idea."
"No--"
"None. Next question."
"But--"
"I'm not fucking you around, Nile. I have *no* idea, *none* of us do. *Next* question."
"Okay, we'll come back to that. How *many* of us are there?"
"Five, counting the two of us. We're going to meet the others."
"How?"
"You're asking the *wrong* question."
"What's the *right* question?"
"Not *how. When.*"
"Okay, you gonna *explain* that?"
"You go five hundred, a *thousand* years, you get stabbed, shot, burnt alive, doesn't slow you *down...*
"They'll survive."
"Hell with *that!* You *can't* expect me to just forget them!"


"And they're *immortal,* like us?"
"We're *not* immortal."
"But you said--"
"I *lied.* We're *effectively* immortal. But we *can* die."
"...then one day you wake up and get thrown from a horse and snap your neck, or get washed overboard and you drown, and that's it.
"You're done."
"That is...*really* depressing."
"Wait 'til you're *my* age, it'll seem like a fucking *blessing.*"
"Just how old are you?"
"*Old.*"
"Yeah but *how* old?"
"Old enough I lost track a *long* time ago...
"...old enough to have *forgotten* the people who once *loved* me."
"Yeah, well, the people who *loved* me still *do.* They're gonna wonder where I am. They're gonna think I went *AWOL.*"
E-AA1
"If you really *do* love them, that'll be the *first* thing you do..."


...for *their* sakes if not for ***yours.***
Later.
What the hell does ***that*** mean?
Not later, ***now,*** dammit.
I've followed you ***this*** far, given you ***no*** grief. Gimme a ***straight*** damn answer!
Ask Booker when you get the chance.
Ask him what happened to his ***family.***
Follow.

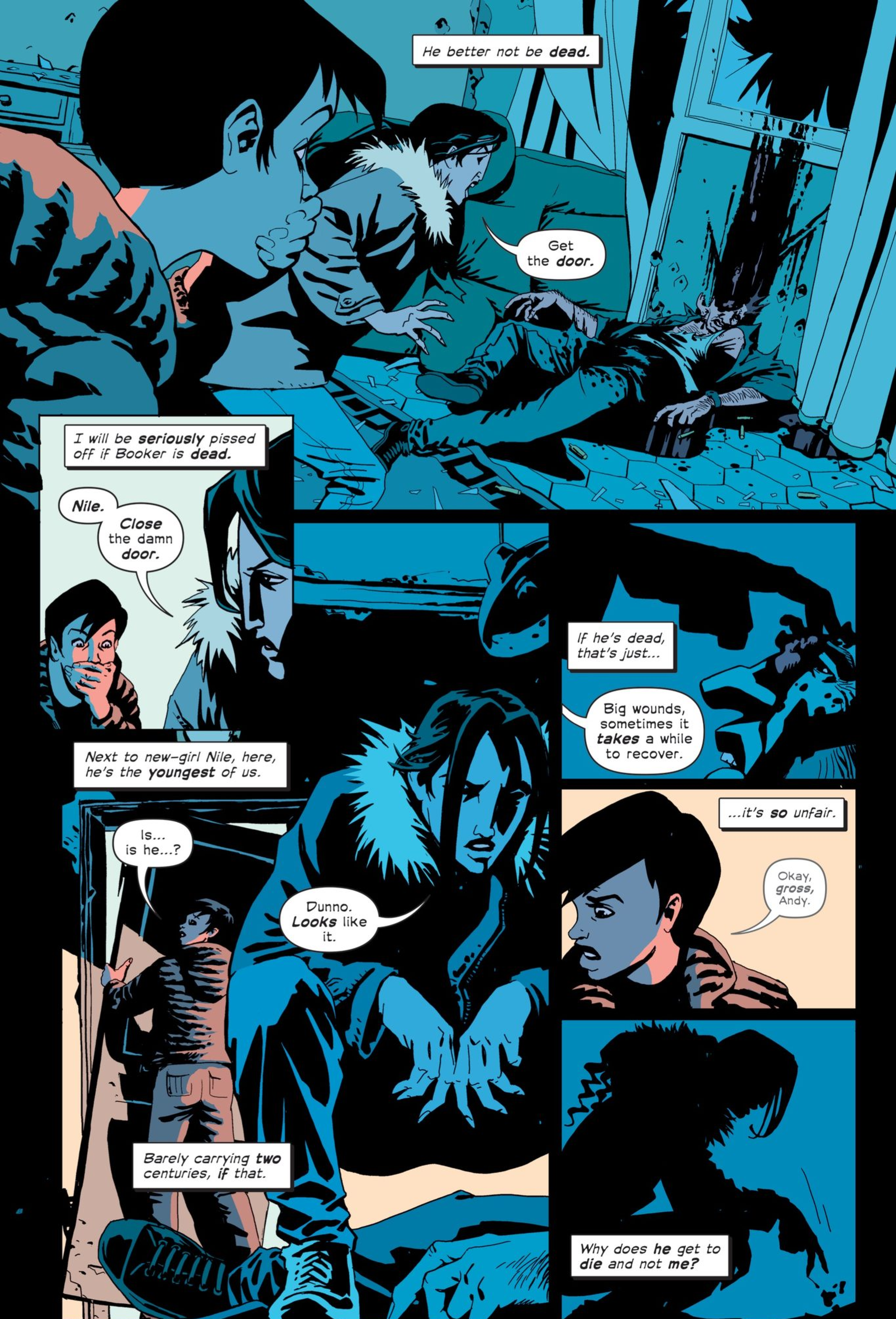

You don't really *live* in this place, do you?
What's the matter, you don't like the ***old-piss-and-used-needle*** decor?
Sure, I'd ***totally*** be into it.
If I was ***tetanus.***
It's a ***safe house...***
...we got about a ***dozen*** of them throughout Europe like this.
We don't tend to stay in one place for too ***long*** these days.
Don't you have a ***home?***
What's the point?
This way--
--shit!

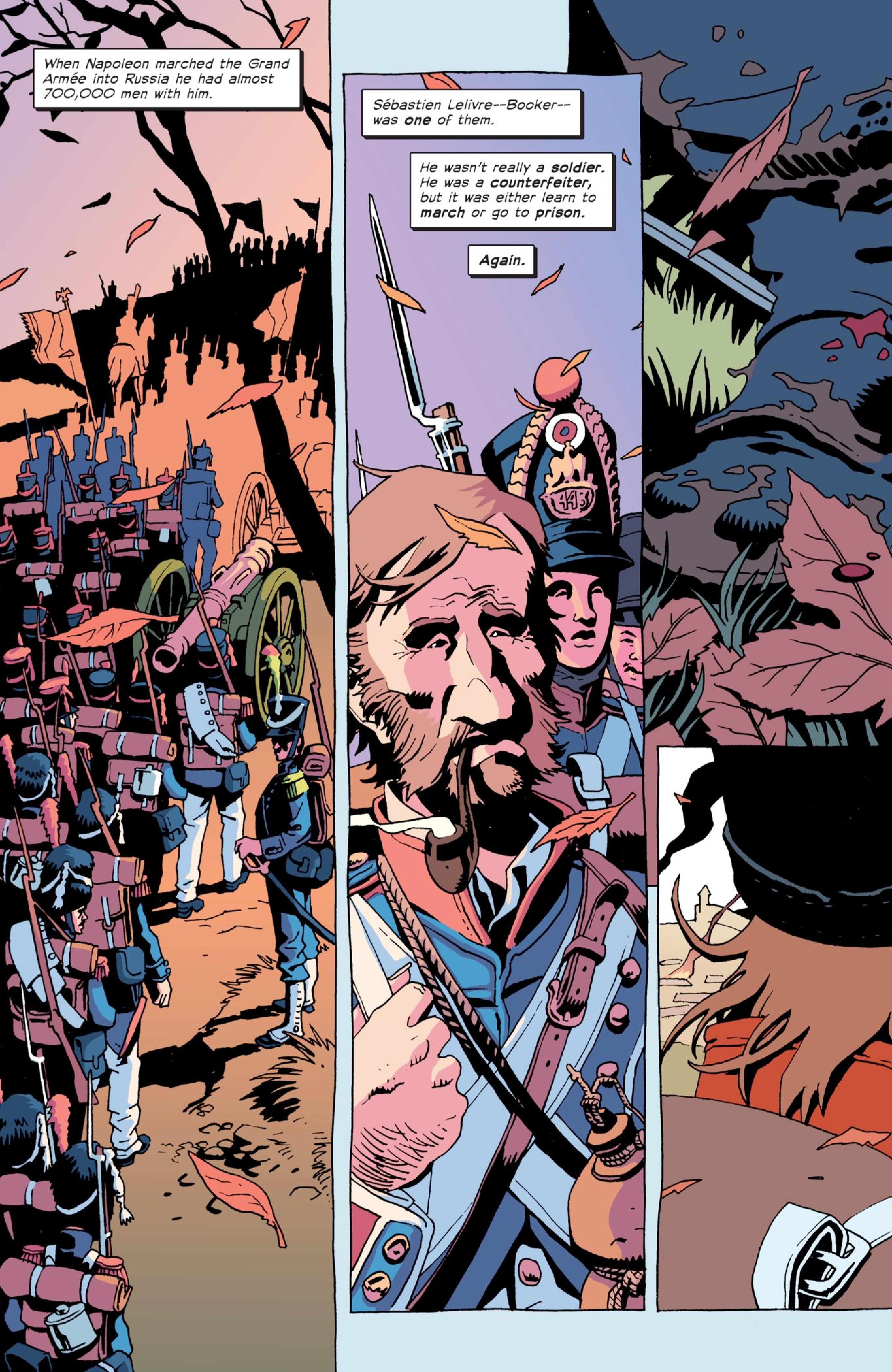

Book!
LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ
Booker!

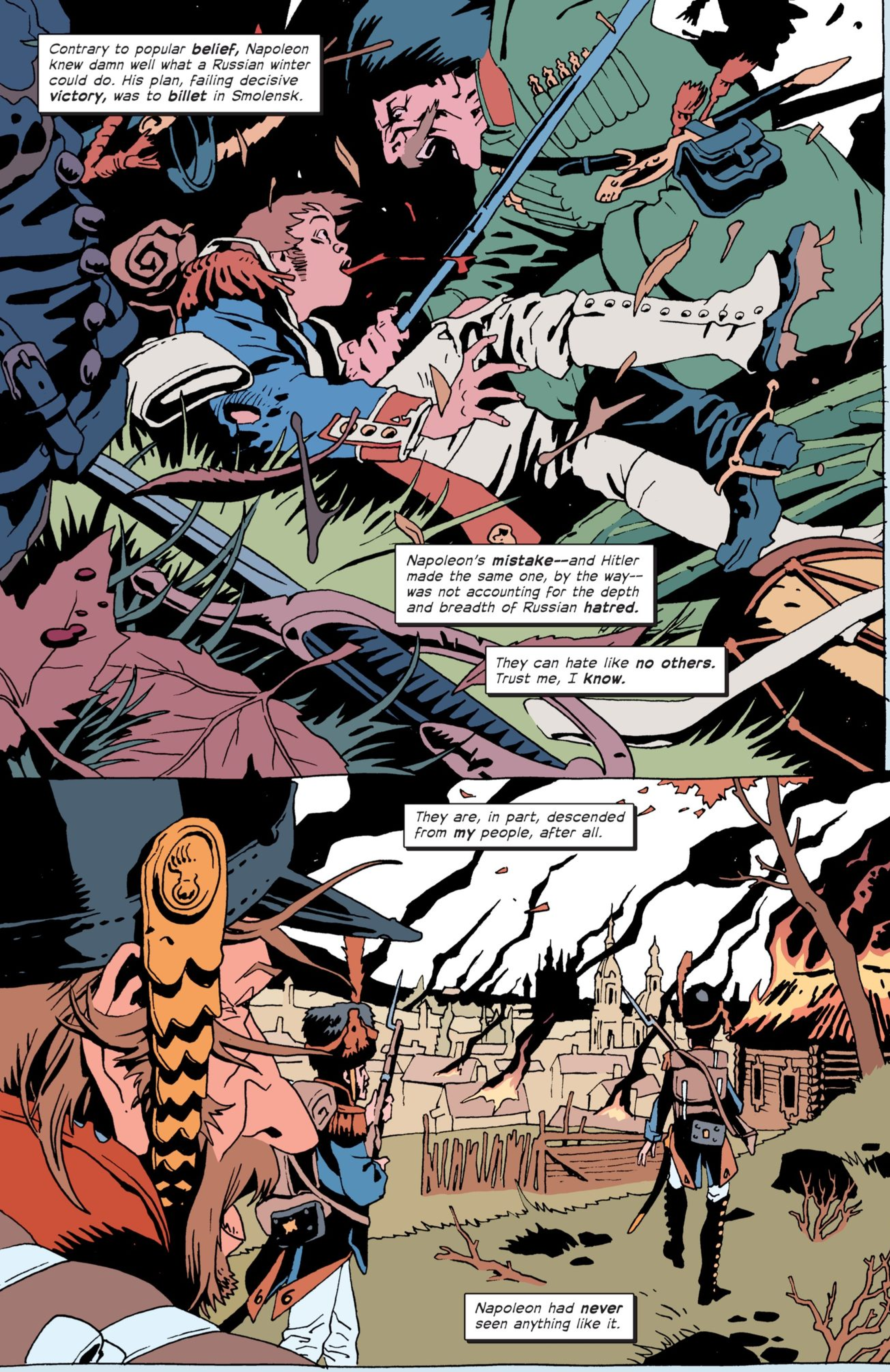
LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ
Daniela Miwa

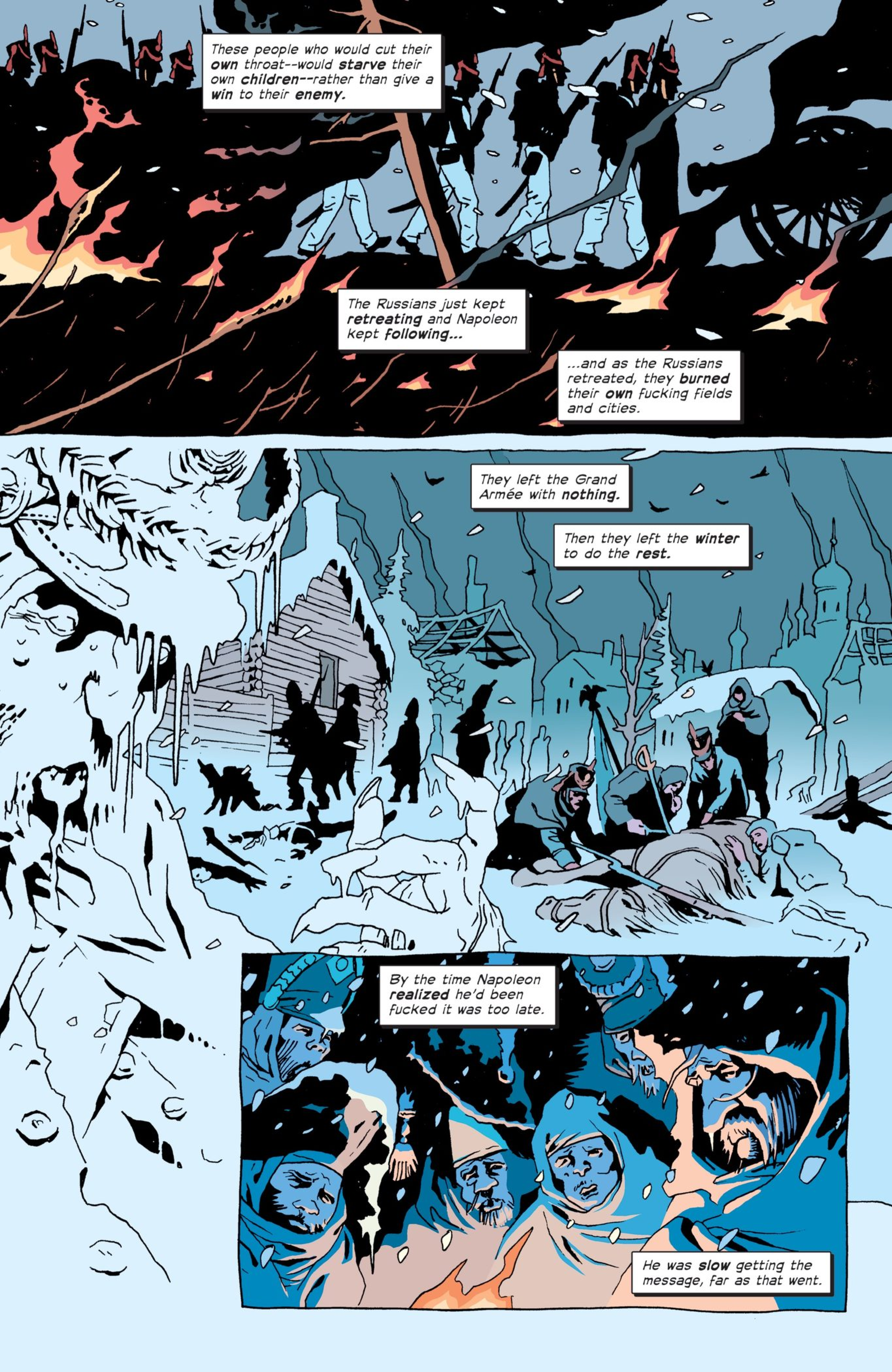
CHAPTER THREE

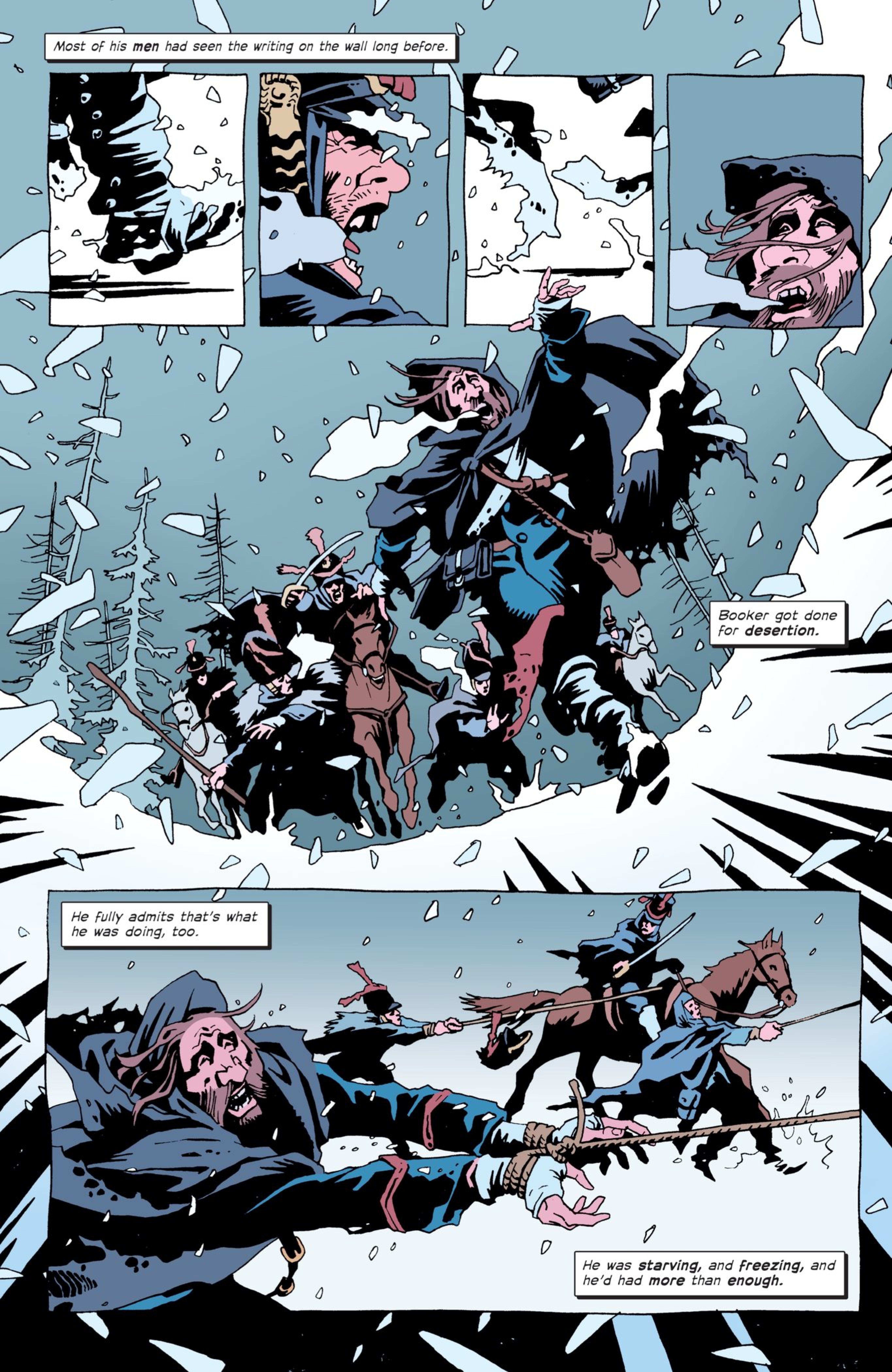
> “**WAR** never takes a **WICKED**
> man by chance, the **GOOD**
> man always.”
>
> ~Sophocles, **Philoctetes**

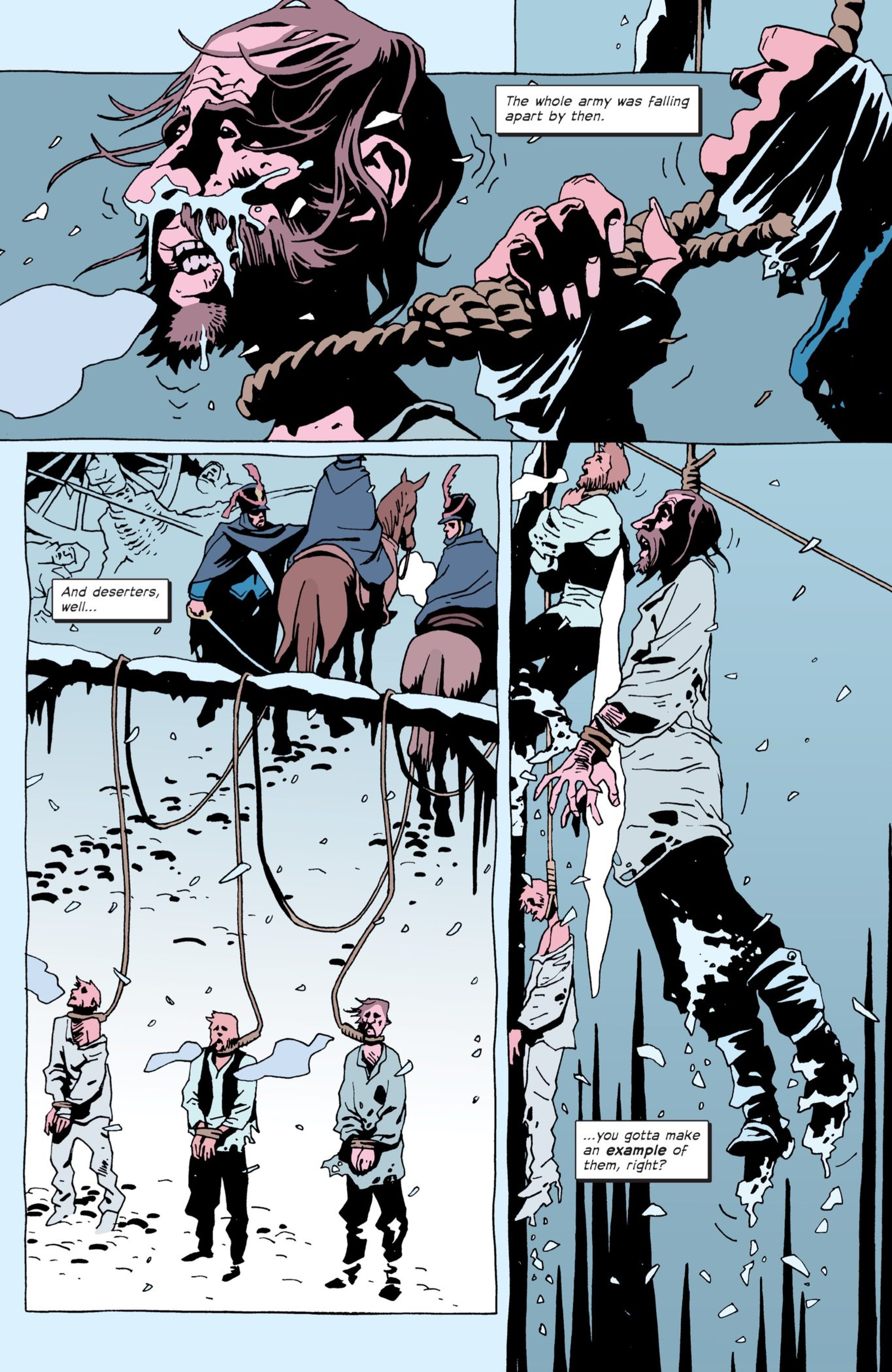

He better not be **dead.**
Get the **door.**
I will be **seriously** pissed off if Booker is **dead.**
Nile. Close the damn **door.**
Next to new-girl Nile, here, he's the **youngest** of us.
Is... is he...?
Dunno. **Looks** like it.
Barely carrying **two** centuries, **if** that.
If he's dead, that's just...
Big wounds, sometimes it **takes** a while to recover.
...it's **so** unfair.
Okay, **gross,** Andy.
Why does **he** get to **die** and not **me?**

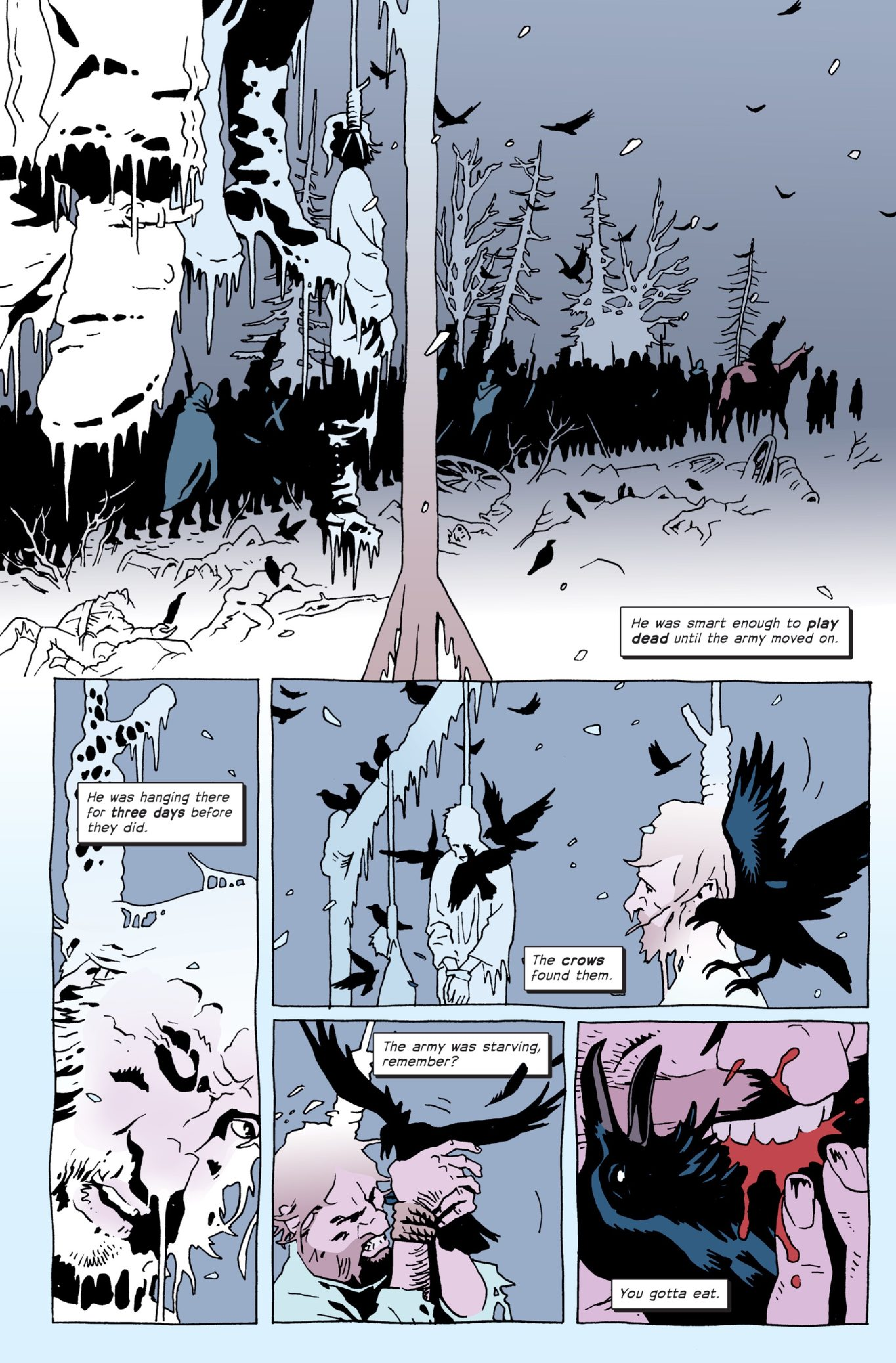

When Napoleon marched the Grand Armée into Russia he had almost 700,000 men with him.
Sébastien Lelivre--Booker--was **one** of them.
He wasn't really a **soldier.** He was a **counterfeiter,** but it was either learn to **march** or go to **prison.**
Again.

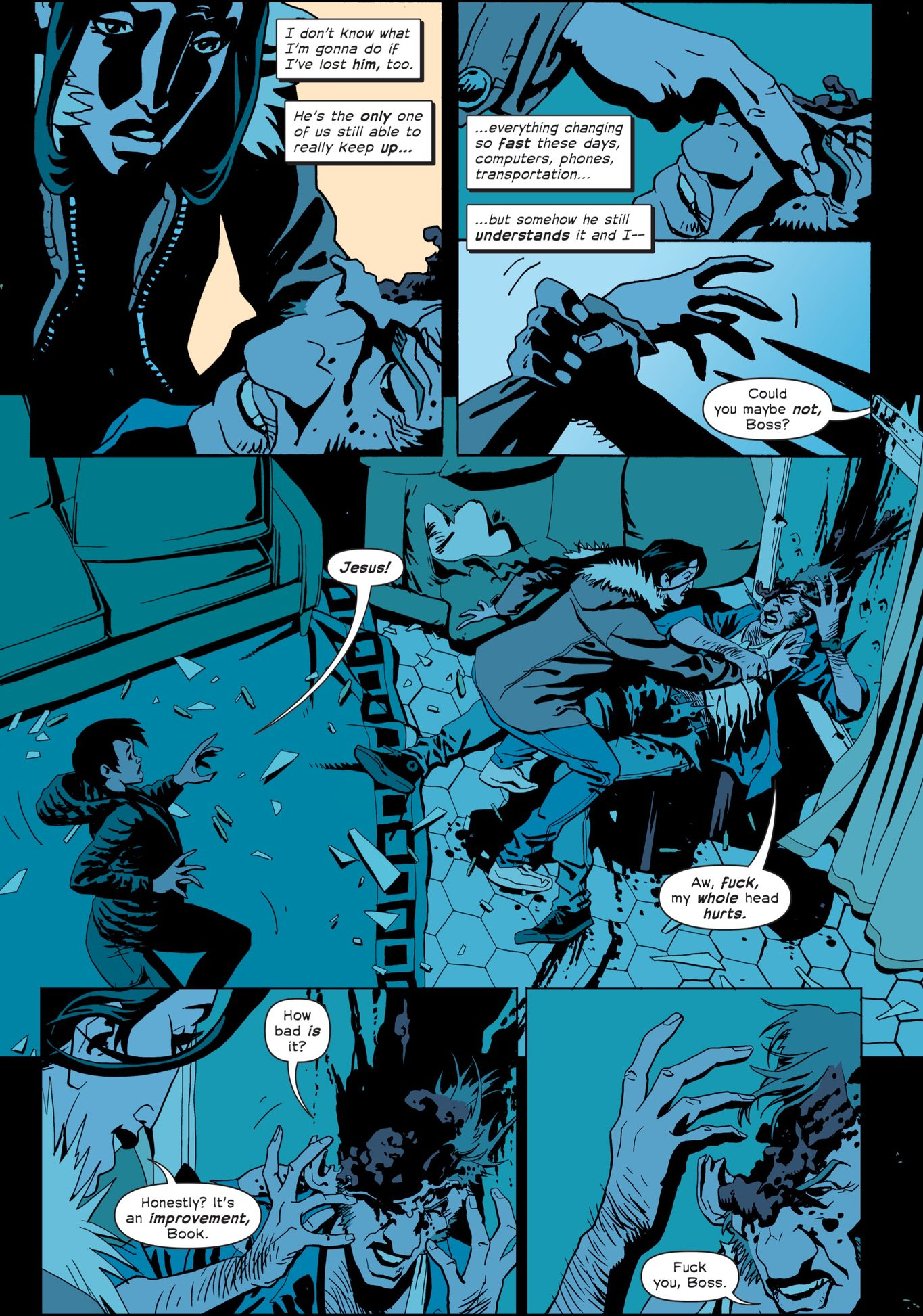

Contrary to popular **belief,** Napoleon knew damn well what a Russian winter could do. His plan, failing decisive **victory,** was to **billet** in Smolensk.
Napoleon's **mistake**--and Hitler made the same one, by the way--was not accounting for the depth and breadth of Russian **hatred.**
They can hate like **no others.** Trust me, I **know.**
They are, in part, descended from **my** people, after all.
Napoleon had **never** seen anything like it.

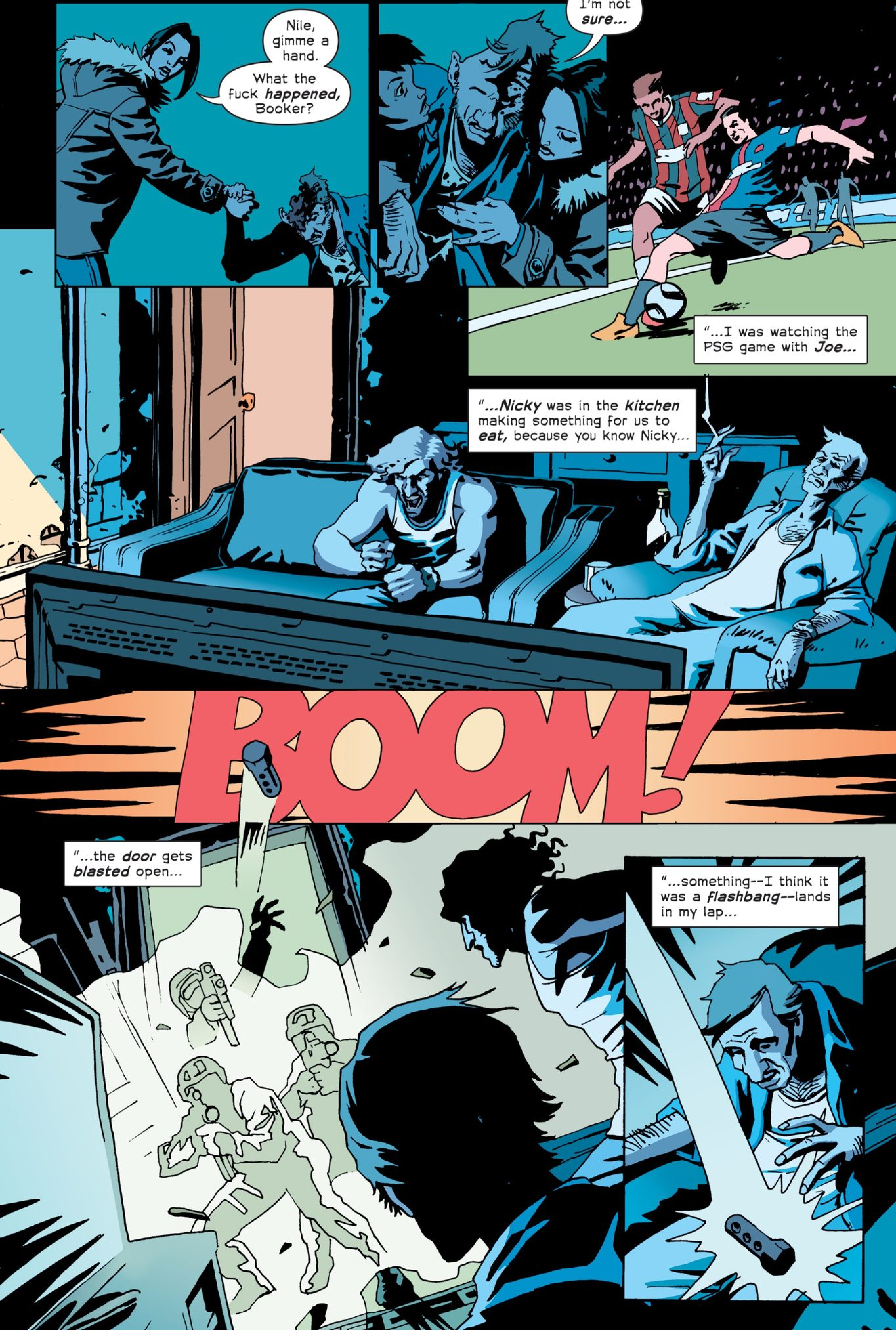

These people who would cut their own throat--would starve their own children--rather than give a win to their enemy.
The Russians just kept retreating and Napoleon kept following...
...and as the Russians retreated, they burned their own fucking fields and cities.
They left the Grand Armée with nothing.
Then they left the winter to do the rest.
By the time Napoleon realized he'd been fucked it was too late.
He was slow getting the message, far as that went.

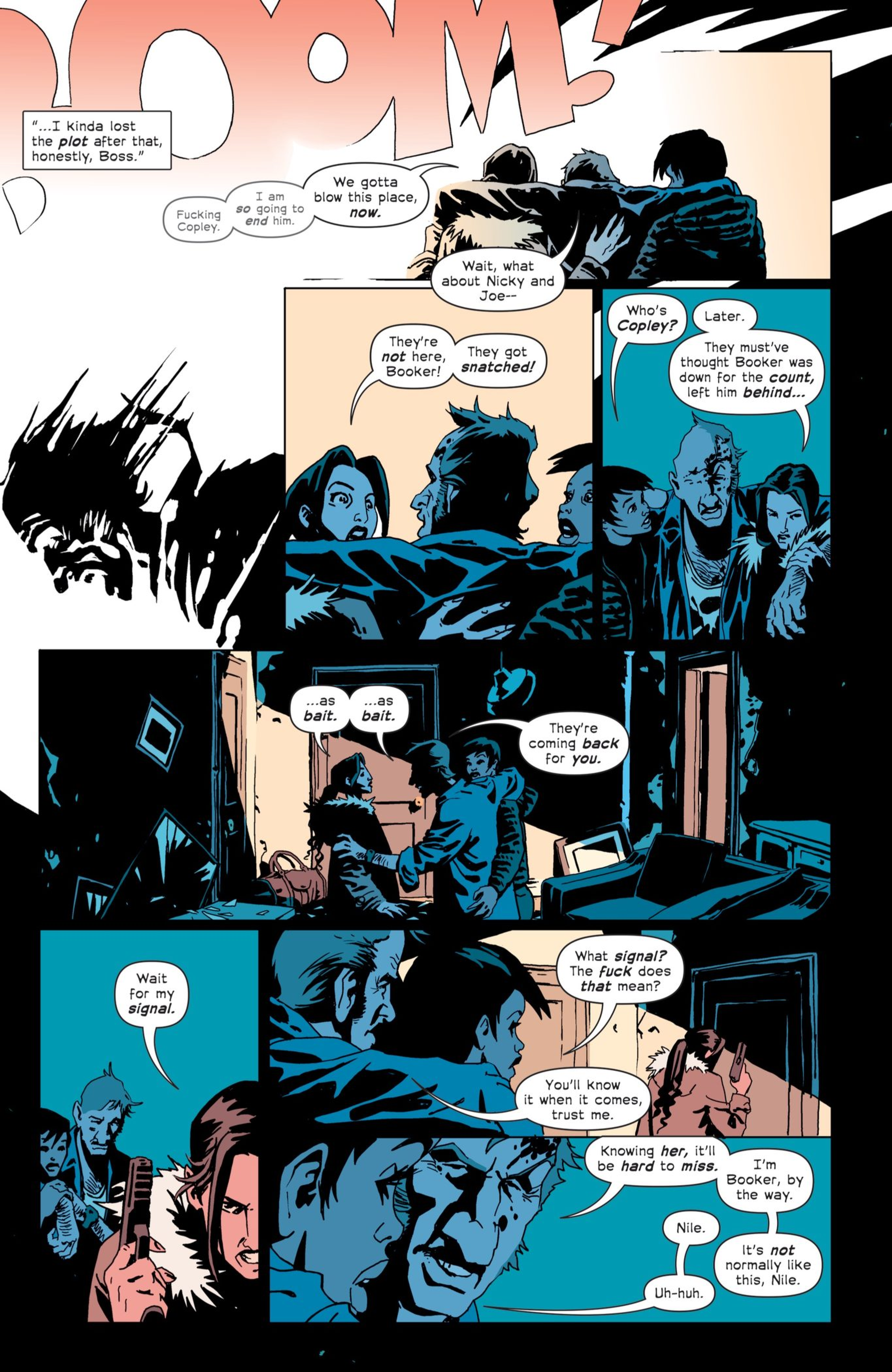

Most of his **men** had seen the writing on the wall long before.
Booker got done for **desertion.**
He fully admits that's what he was doing, too.
He was **starving,** and **freezing,** and he'd had **more** than **enough.**

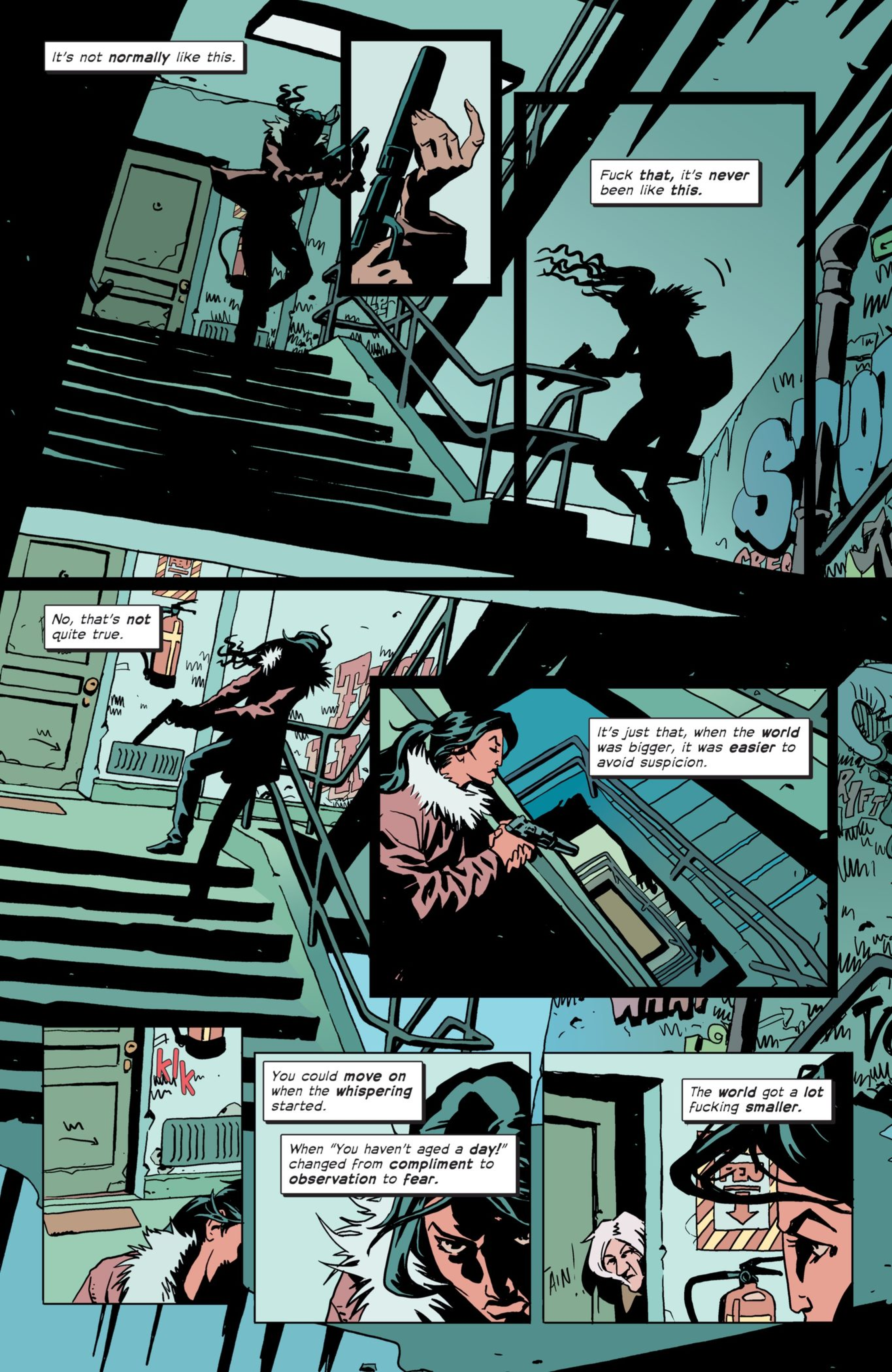

The whole army was falling apart by then.
And deserters, well...
...you gotta make an **example** of them, right?

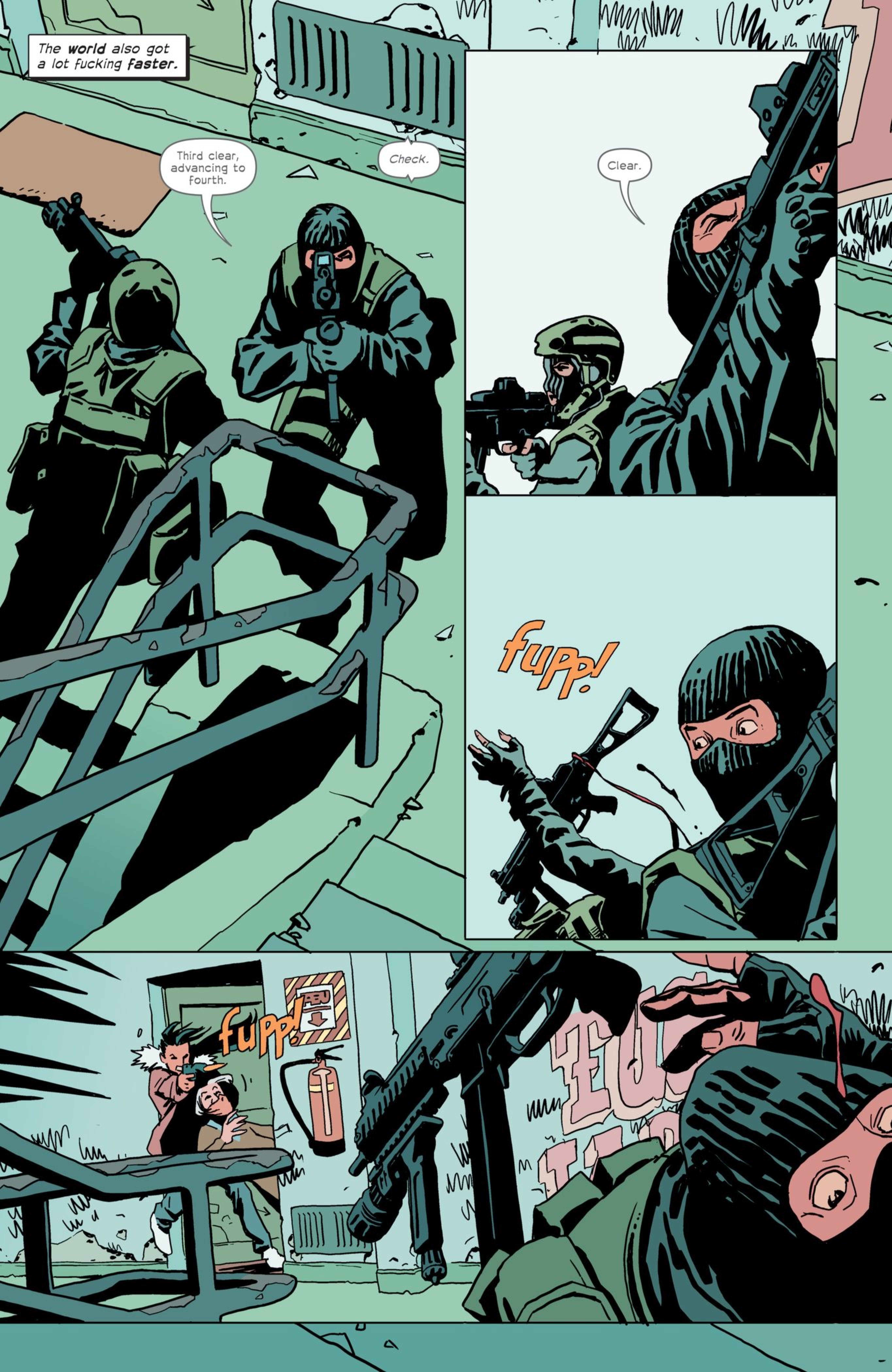

He was smart enough to **play dead** until the army moved on.
He was hanging there for **three days** before they did.
The **crows** found them.
The army was starving, remember?
You gotta eat.

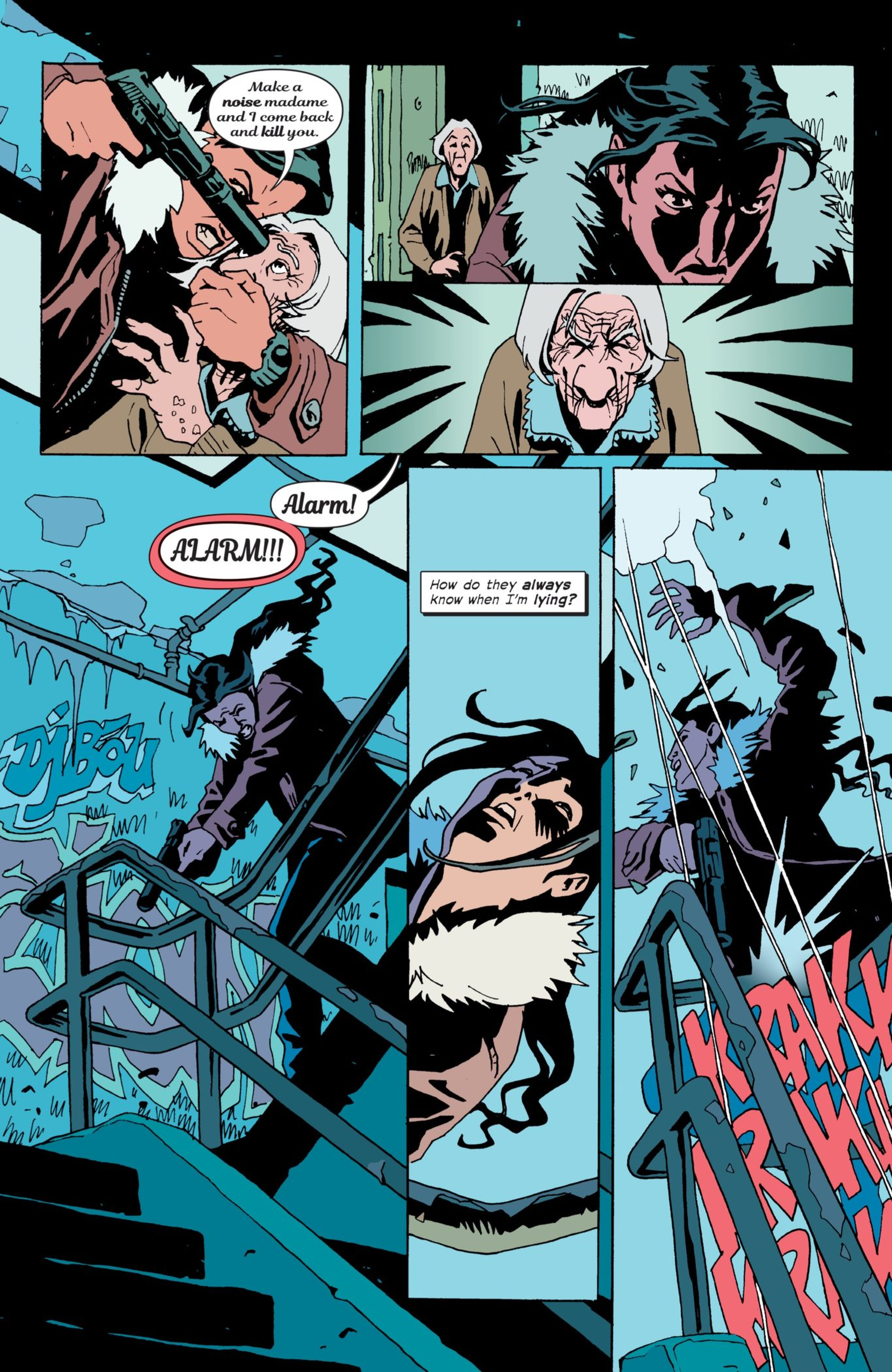

I don't know what I'm gonna do if I've lost **him,** too.
He's the **only** one of us still able to really keep **up...**
...everything changing so **fast** these days, computers, phones, transportation...
...but somehow he still **understands** it and I--
Could you maybe **not,** Boss?
Jesus!
Aw, **fuck,** my **whole** head **hurts.**
How bad **is** it?
Honestly? It's an **improvement,** Book.
Fuck you, Boss.

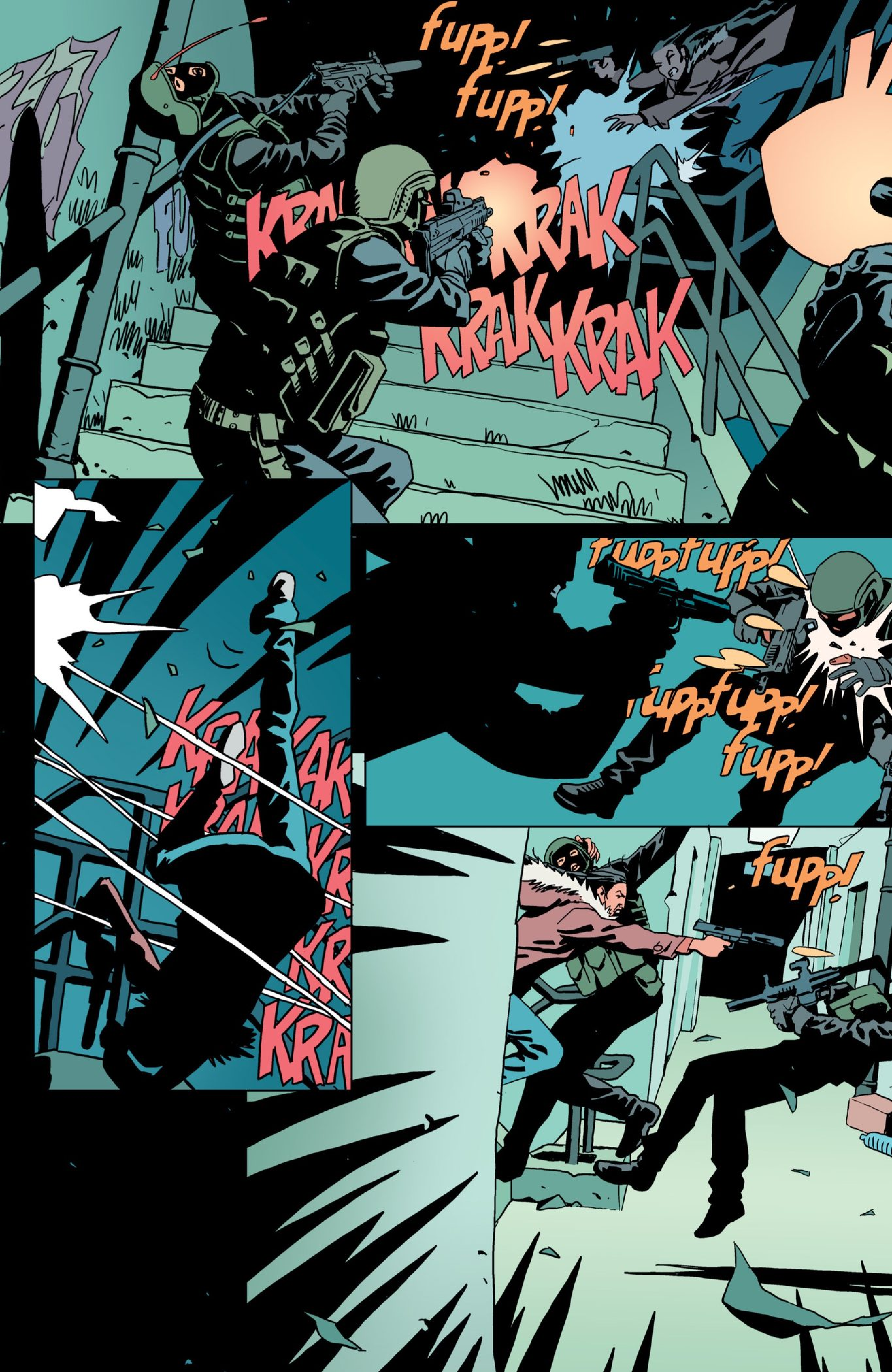

Nile, gimme a hand.
What the fuck *happened,* Booker?
I'm not *sure...*
"...I was watching the PSG game with *Joe...*
"...*Nicky* was in the *kitchen* making something for us to *eat,* because you know Nicky...
BOOM!
"...the *door* gets *blasted* open...
"...something--I think it was a *flashbang*--lands in my lap...

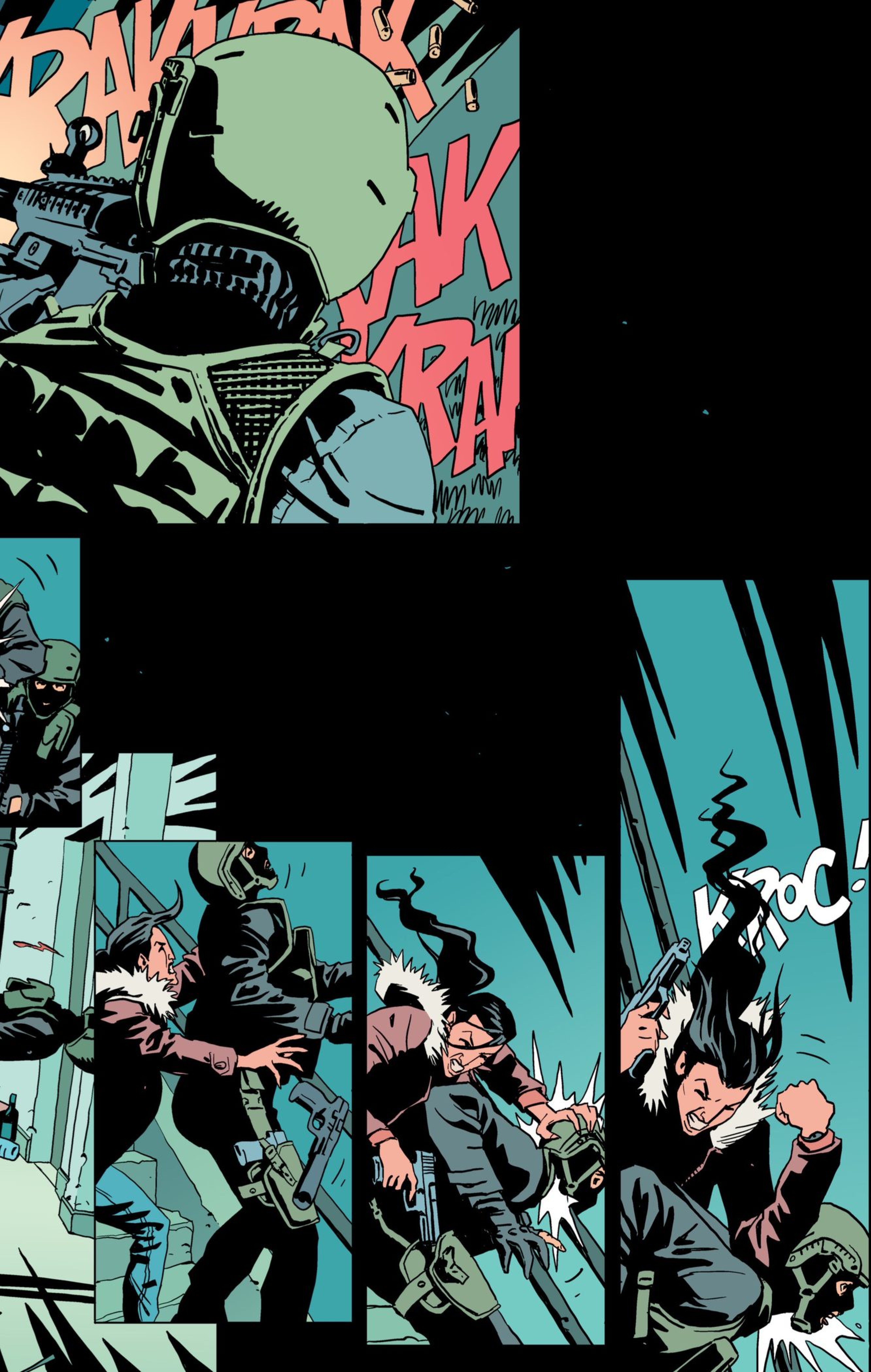

BOOM!
"...I kinda lost the plot after that, honestly, Boss."
Fucking Copley.
I am so going to end him.
We gotta blow this place, now.
Wait, what about Nicky and Joe--
They're not here, Booker!
They got snatched!
Who's Copley?
Later.
They must've thought Booker was down for the count, left him behind...
...as bait.
...as bait.
They're coming back for you.
Wait for my signal.
What signal? The fuck does that mean?
You'll know it when it comes, trust me.
Knowing her, it'll be hard to miss.
I'm Booker, by the way.
Nile.
It's not normally like this, Nile.
Uh-huh.

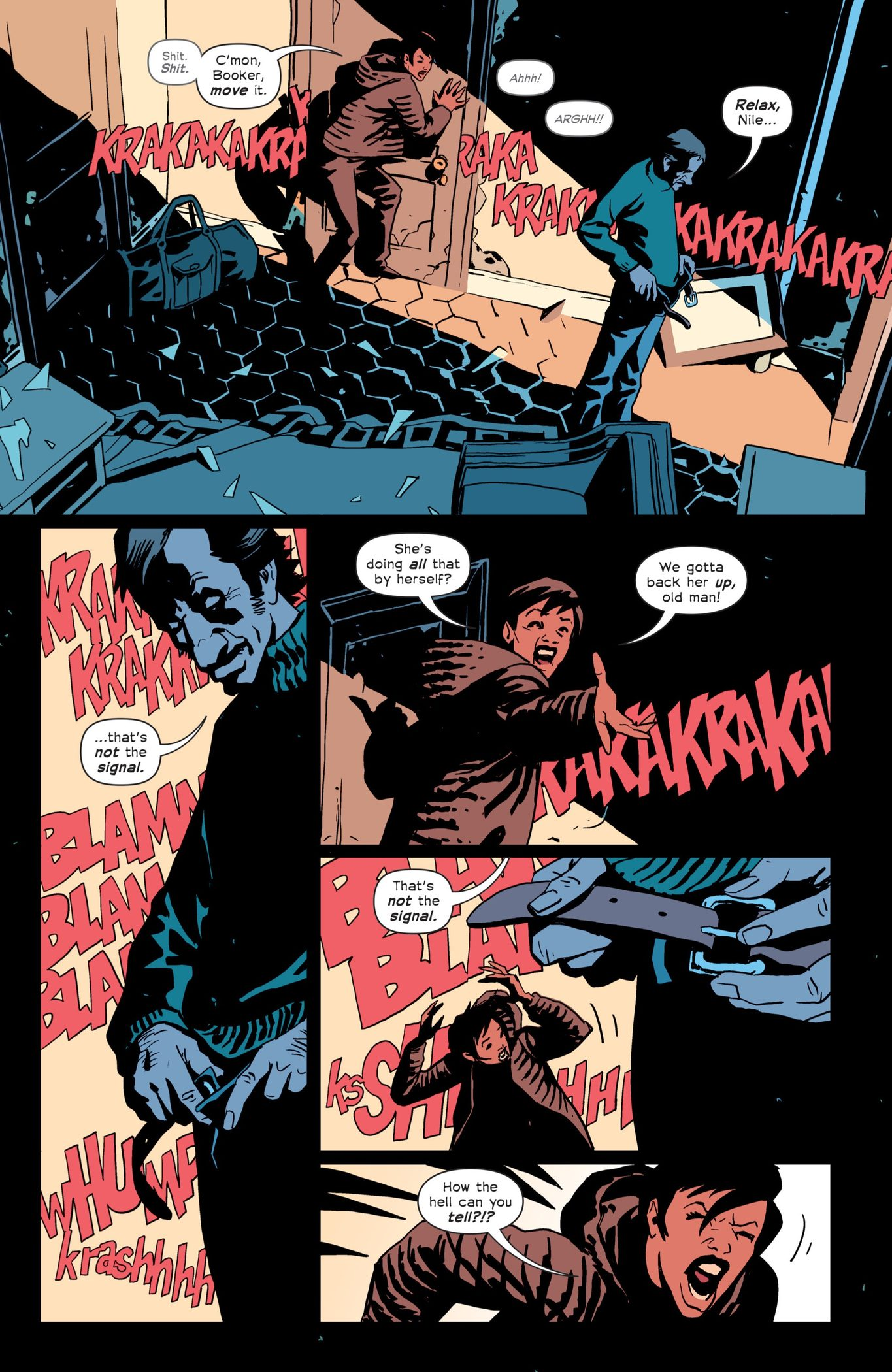

It's not **normally** like this.
Fuck **that,** it's **never** been like **this.**
No, that's **not** quite true.
It's just that, when the **world** was bigger, it was **easier** to avoid suspicion.
klk
You could **move on** when the **whispering** started.
When "You haven't aged a **day!**" changed from **compliment** to **observation** to **fear.**
AIN!
The **world** got a **lot** fucking **smaller.**

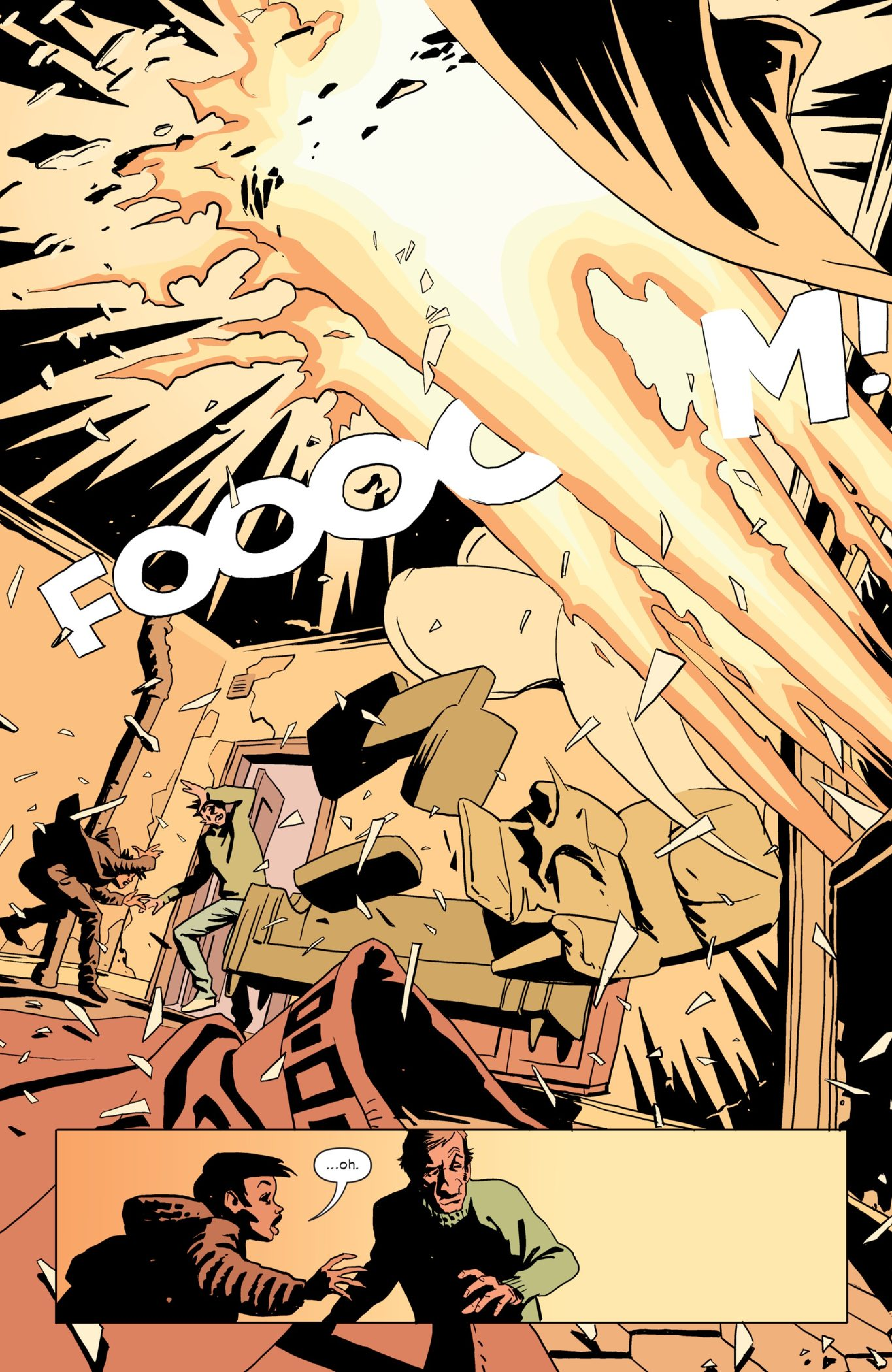

The **world** also got a lot fucking **faster.**
Third clear, advancing to fourth.
Check.
Clear.
fupp!
fupp!

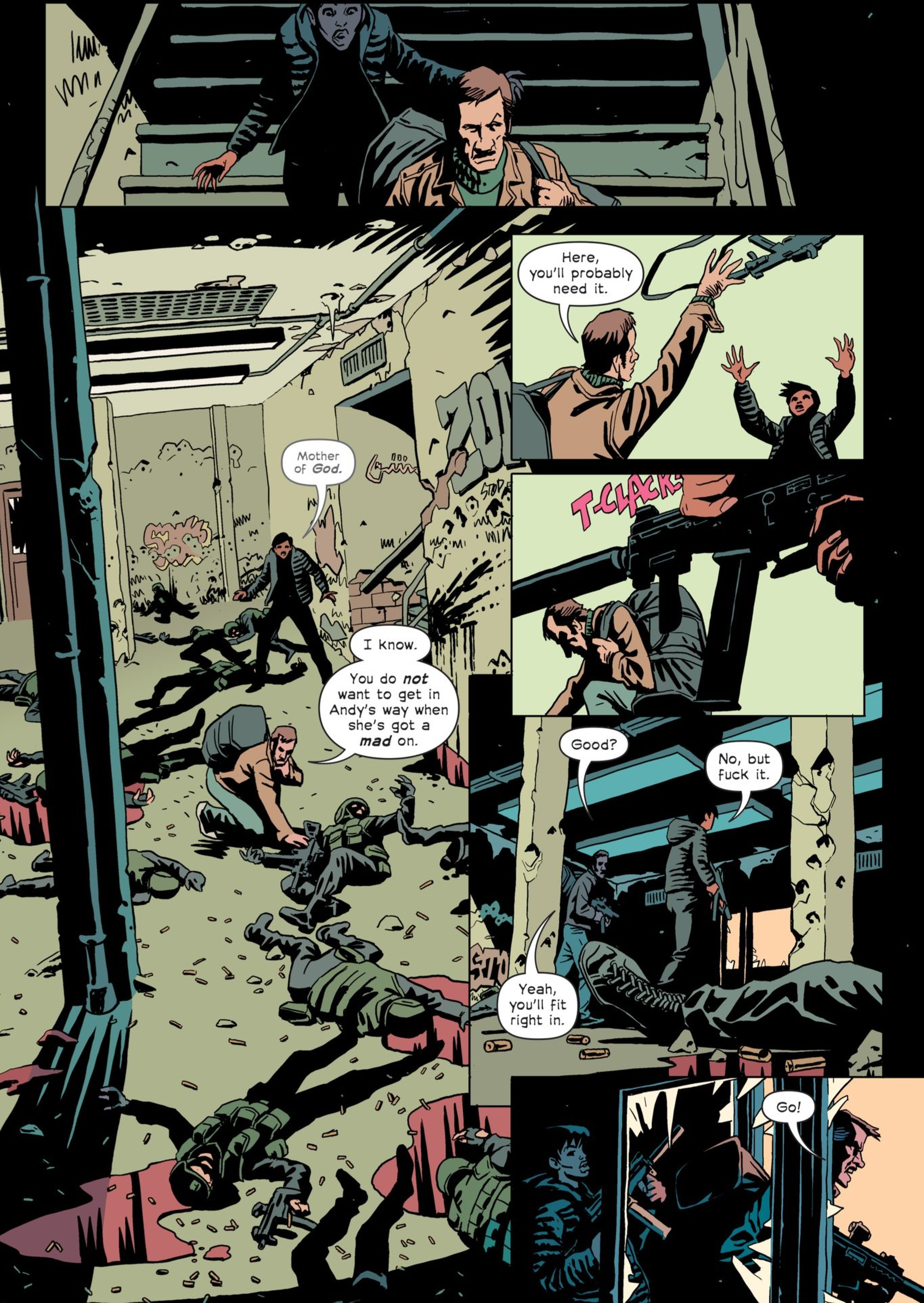

Make a **noise** madame and I come back and **kill** you.
Alarm!
ALARM!!!
DJIBOU
How do they **always** know when I'm **lying?**

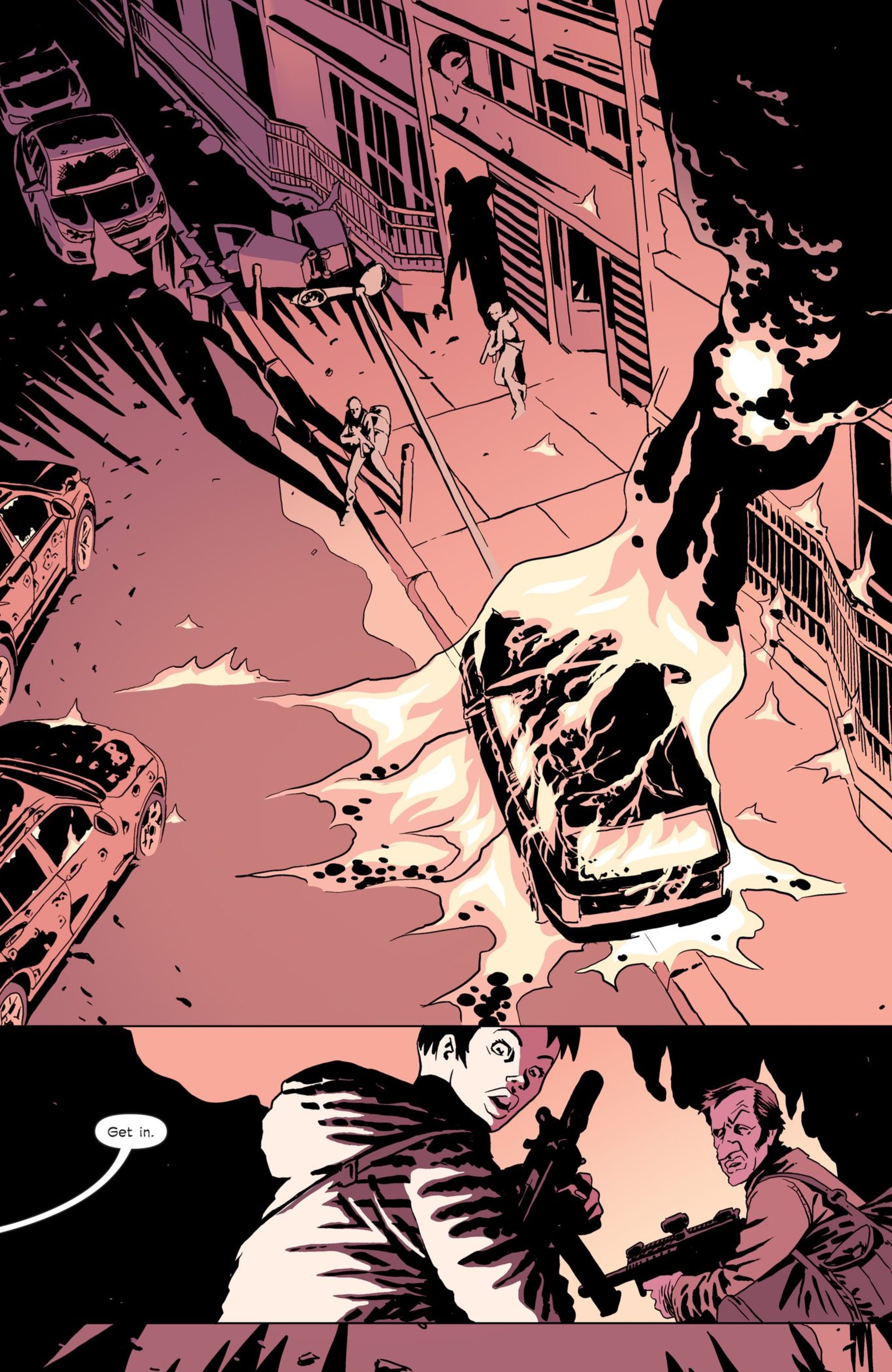

fupp!
fupp!
KRAK
KRAK
KRAK
KRAK
KRA
fuppfupp!
fuppfupp!
fupp!
fupp!

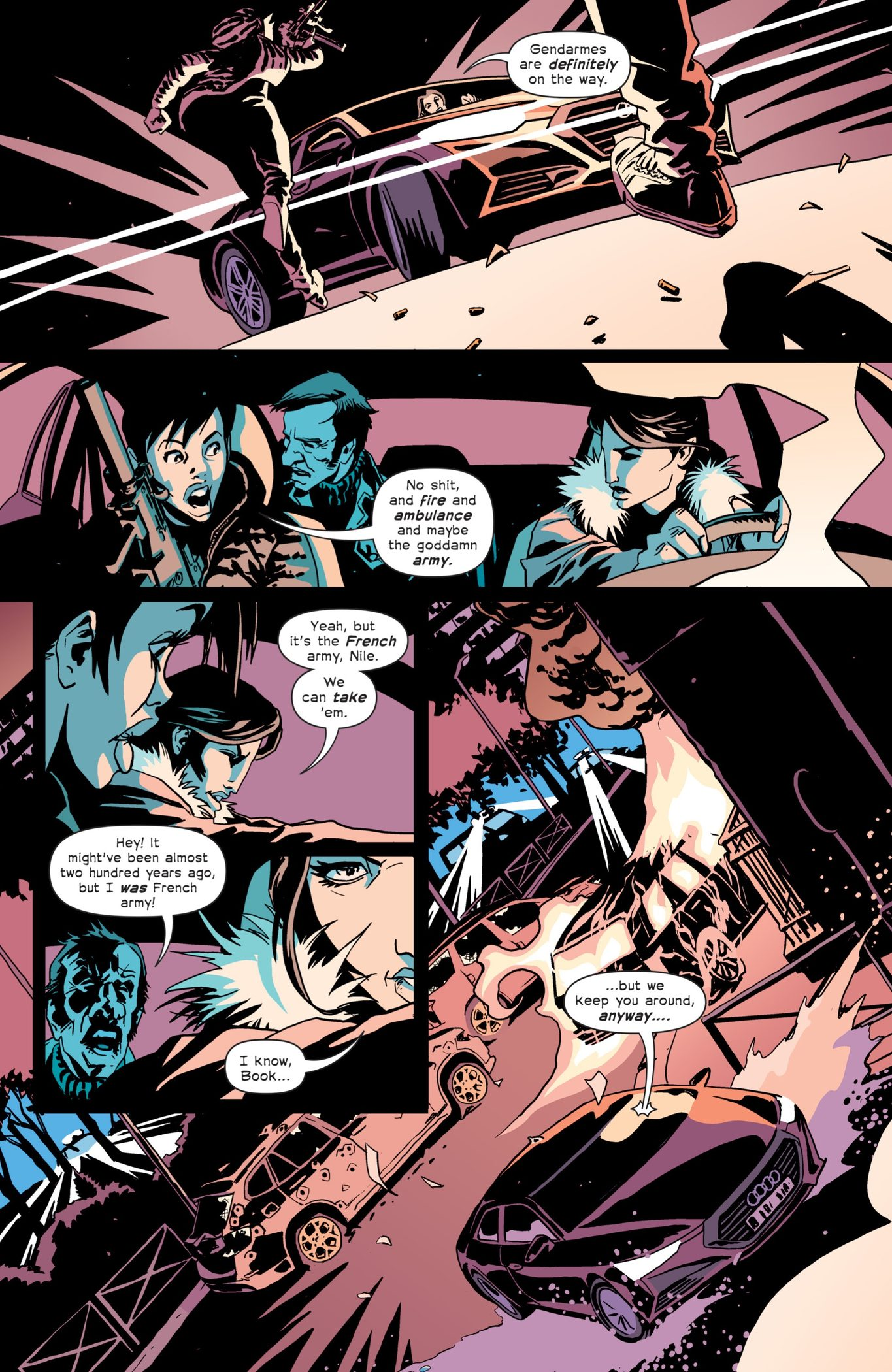

RAKRAK
AK
RA
KROC!

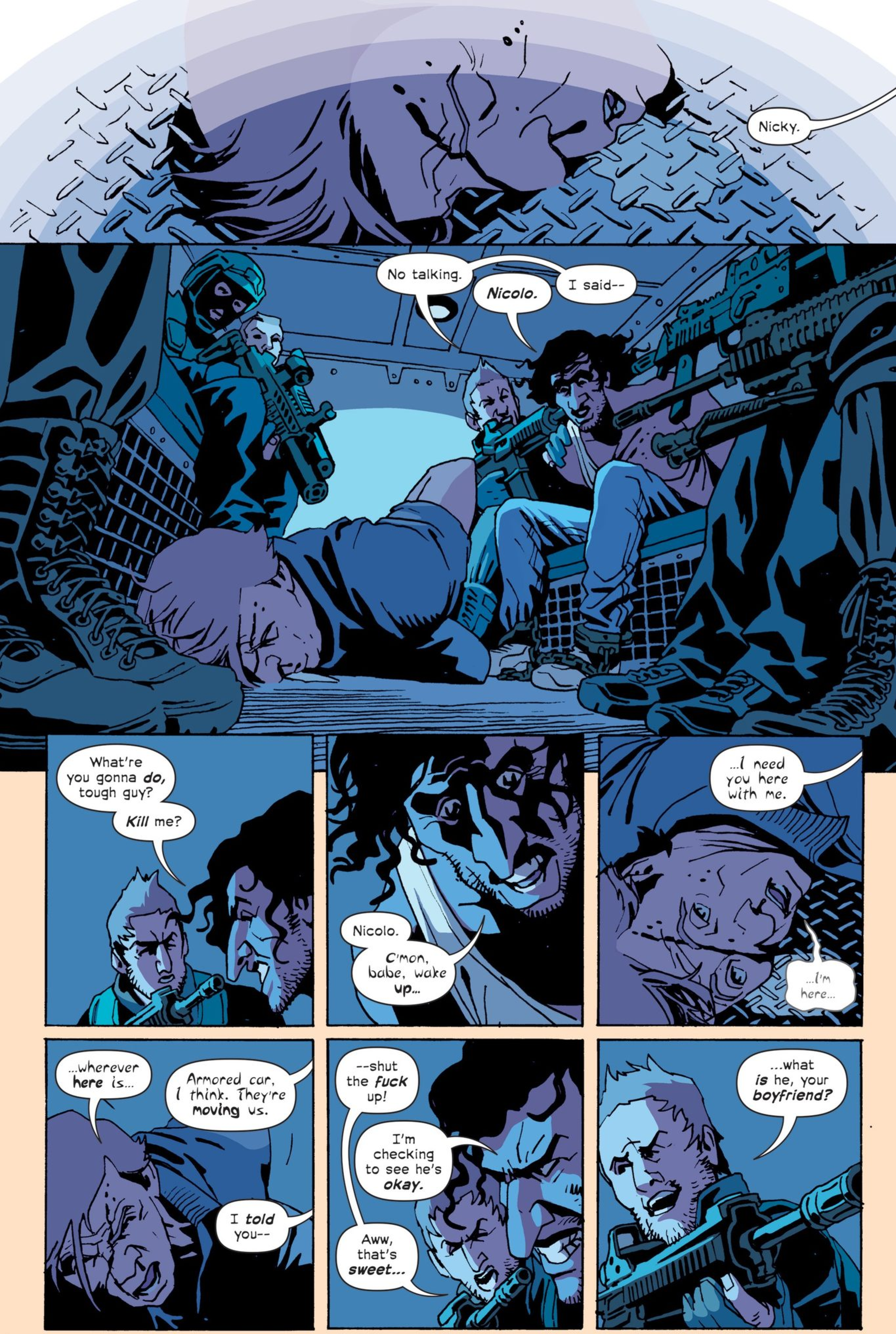

Shit. *Shit.*
C'mon, Booker, *move* it.
KRAKAKAKRA
Ahhh!
ARGHH!!
RAKA
KRAK
Relax, Nile...
KAKRAKAKRA
KRAK
KRAK
...that's *not* the *signal.*
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
WHUMP
krashhhh
She's doing *all* that by herself?
We gotta back her *up,* old man!
KRAKAKRAKA
That's *not* the *signal.*
BLA
ksSHHHH
How the hell can you *tell?!?*

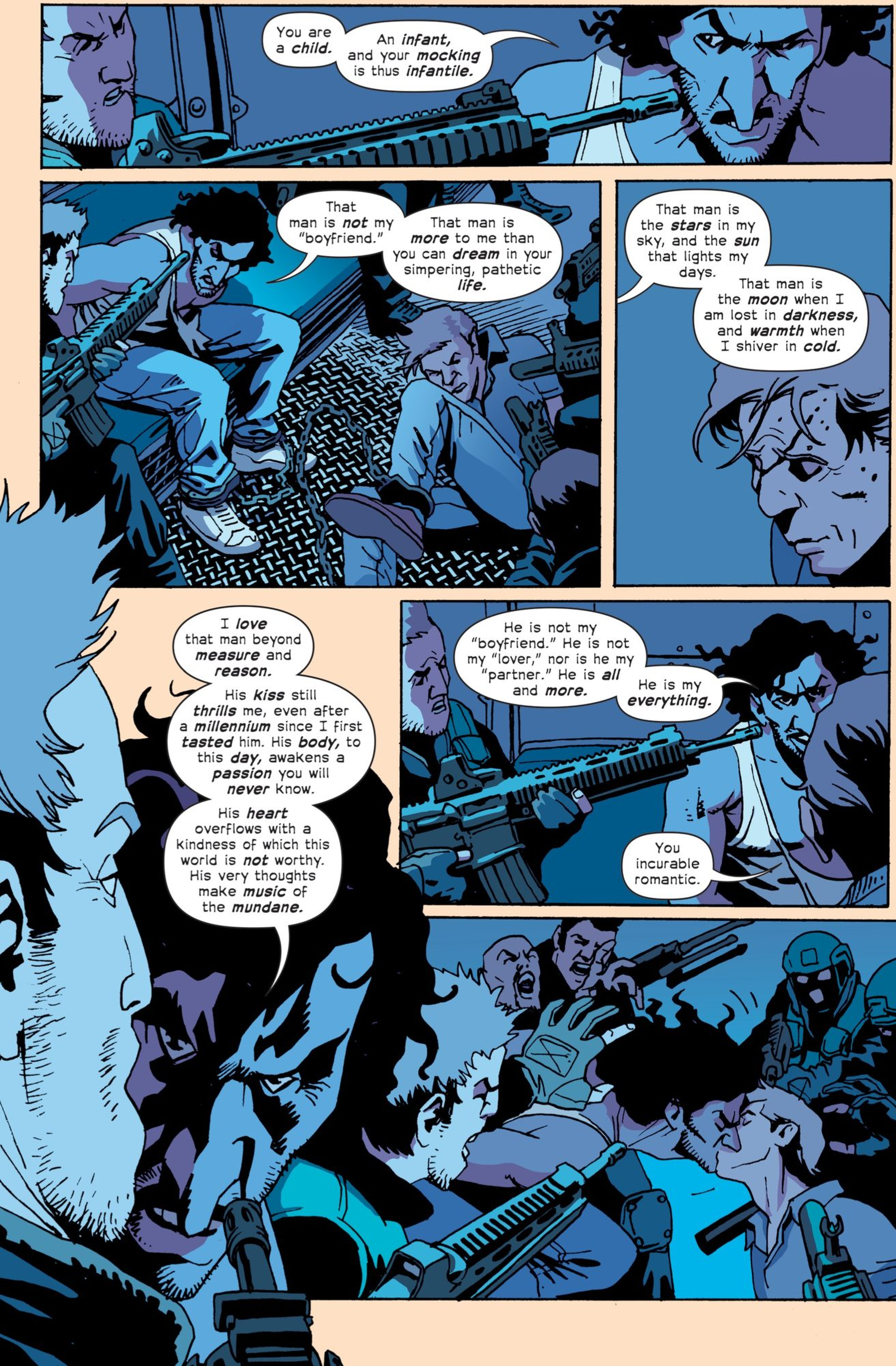

FOOOOM!
...oh.

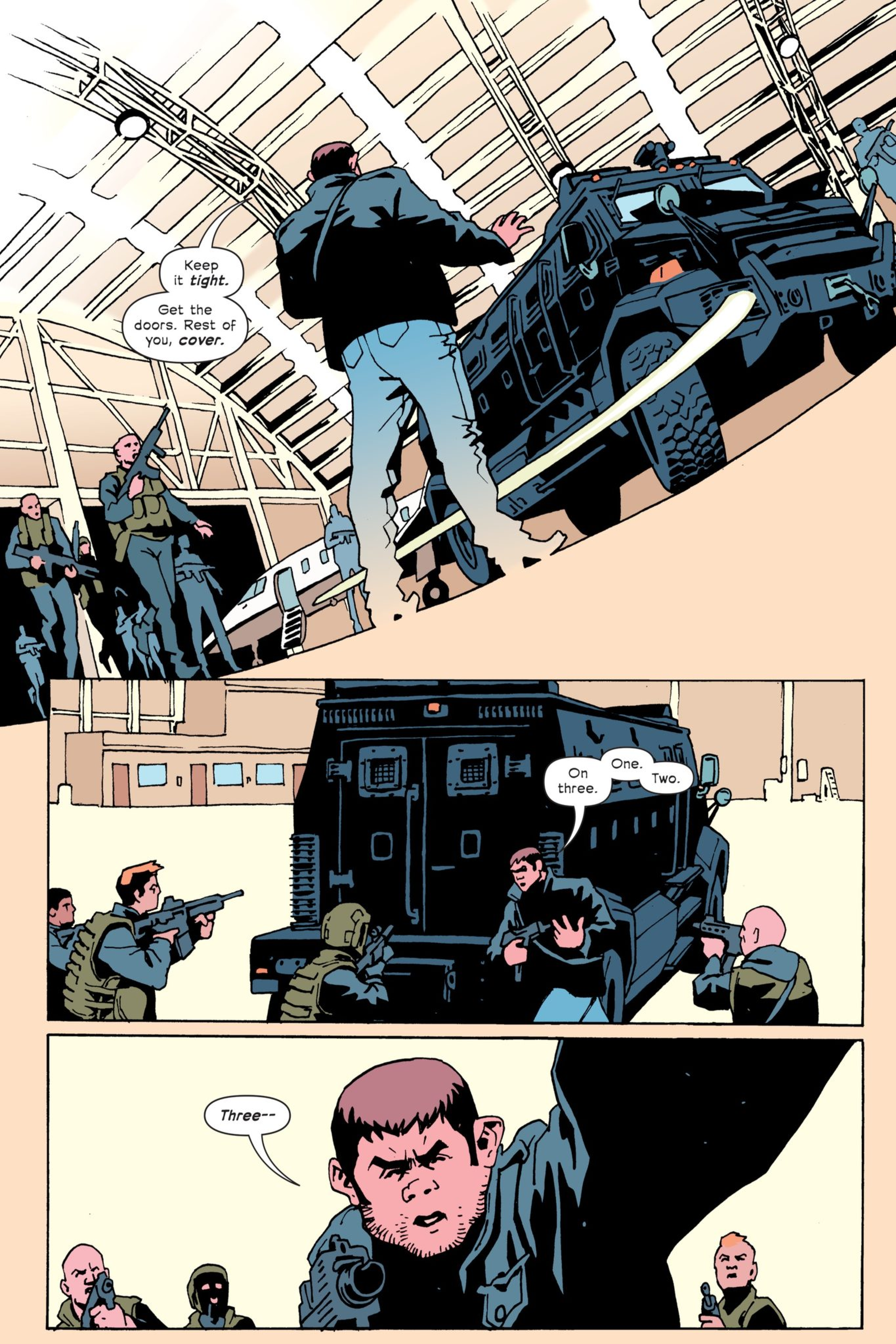

Mother of *God.*
I know.
You do *not* want to get in Andy's way when she's got a *mad* on.
Here, you'll probably need it.
T-CLACK!
Good?
No, but fuck it.
Yeah, you'll fit right in.
Go!

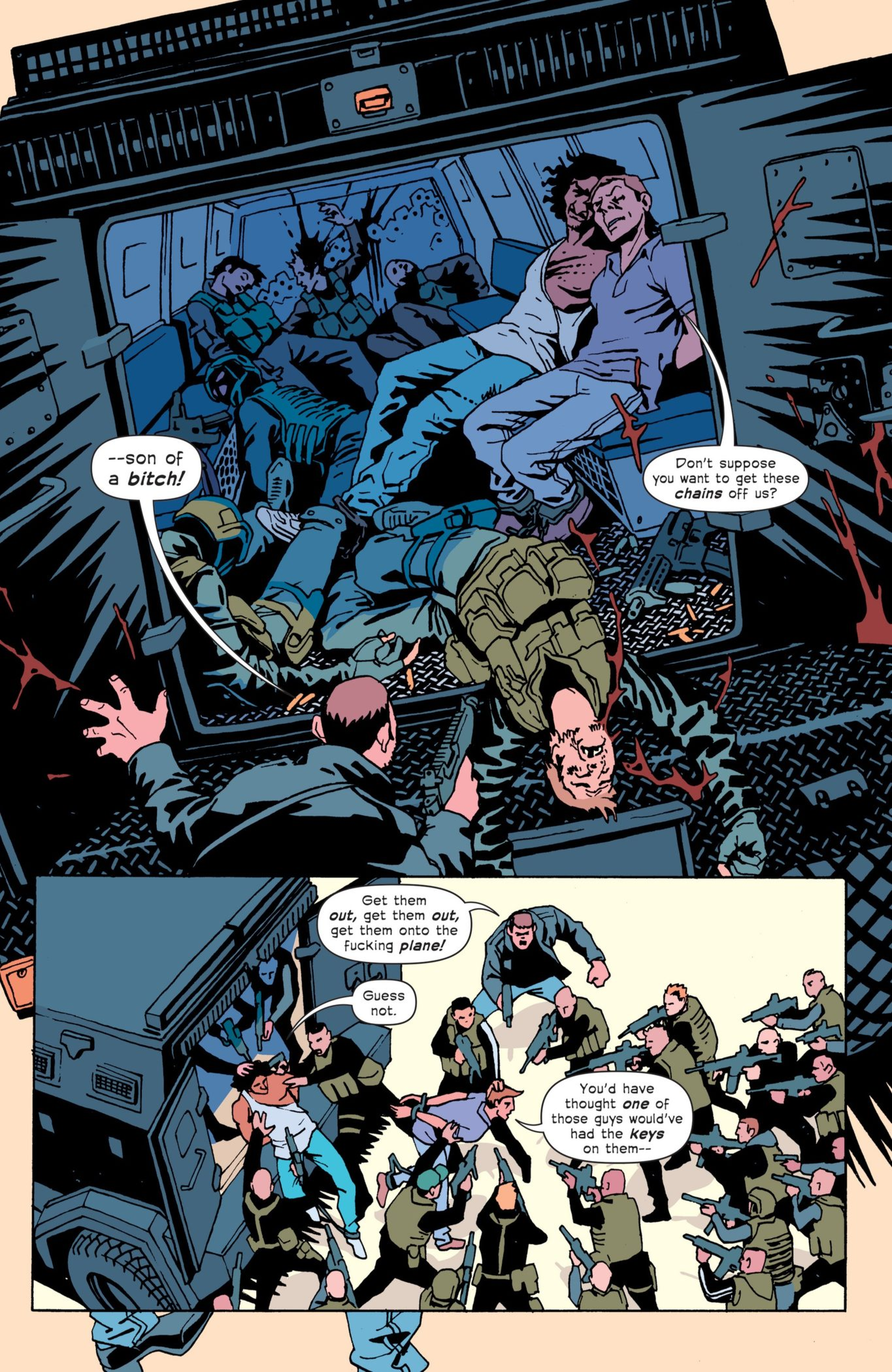

Get in.

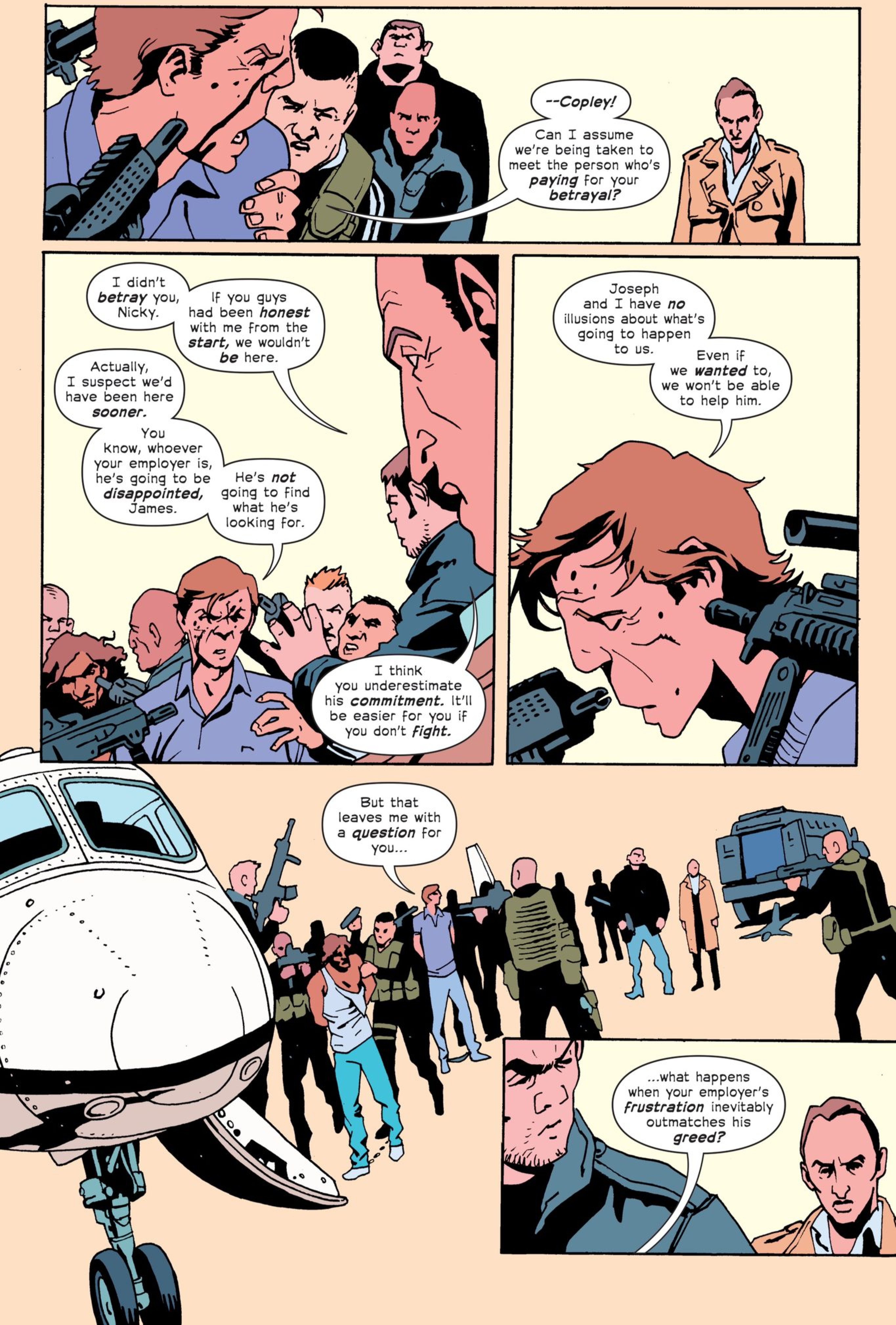

Gendarmes are *definitely* on the way.
No shit, and *fire* and *ambulance* and maybe the goddamn *army.*
Yeah, but it's the *French* army, Nile.
We can *take* 'em.
Hey! It might've been almost two hundred years ago, but I *was* French army!
I know, Book...
...but we keep you around, *anyway....*

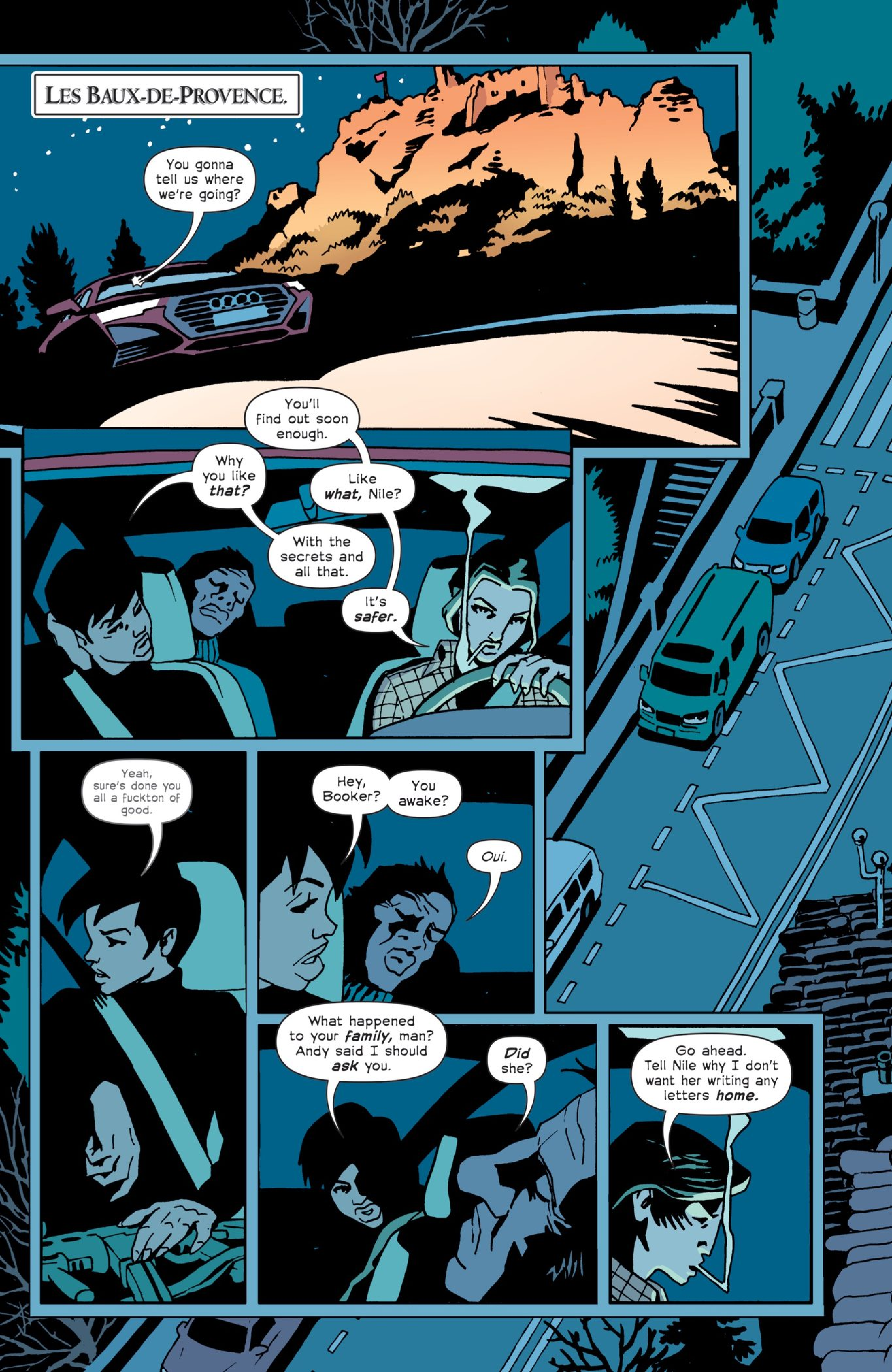

Nicky.
No talking.
Nicolo.
I said--
What're you gonna **do,** tough guy?
Kill me?
Nicolo.
C'mon, babe, wake **up...**
...I need you here with me.
...I'm here...
...wherever **here** is...
Armored car, I think. They're **moving** us.
I **told** you--
--shut the **fuck** up!
I'm checking to see he's **okay.**
Aww, that's **sweet...**
...what **is** he, your **boyfriend?**

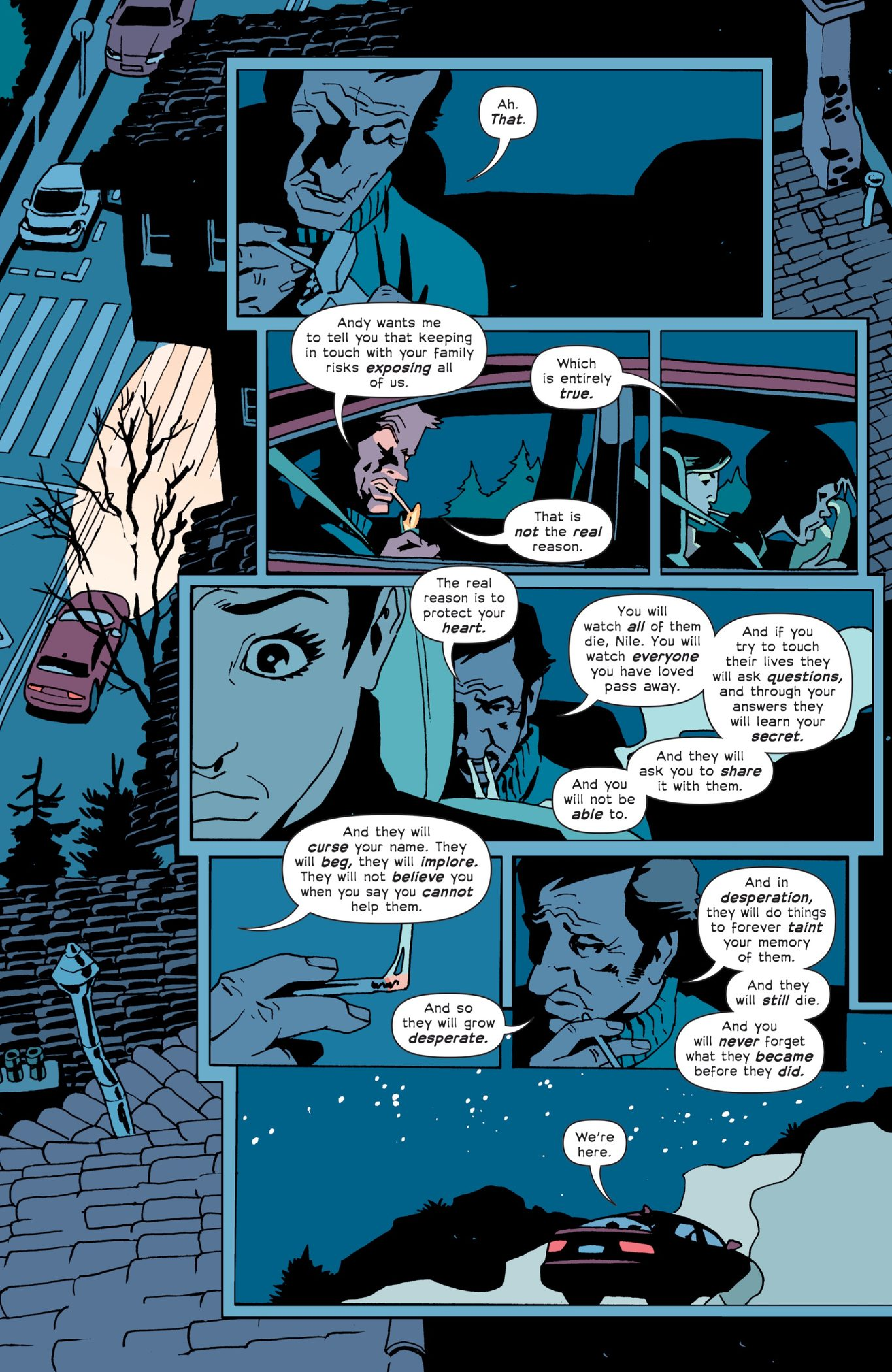

You are a *child.*
An *infant,* and your *mocking* is thus *infantile.*
That man is ***not*** my "boyfriend."
That man is *more* to me than you can *dream* in your simpering, pathetic *life.*
That man is the *stars* in my sky, and the *sun* that lights my days.
That man is the *moon* when I am lost in *darkness,* and *warmth* when I shiver in *cold.*
I *love* that man beyond *measure* and *reason.*
His *kiss* still *thrills* me, even after a *millennium* since I first *tasted* him. His *body,* to this *day,* awakens a *passion* you will *never* know.
His *heart* overflows with a kindness of which this world is *not* worthy. His very thoughts make *music* of the *mundane.*
He is not my "boyfriend." He is not my "lover," nor is he my "partner." He is *all* and *more.*
He is my *everything.*
You incurable romantic.

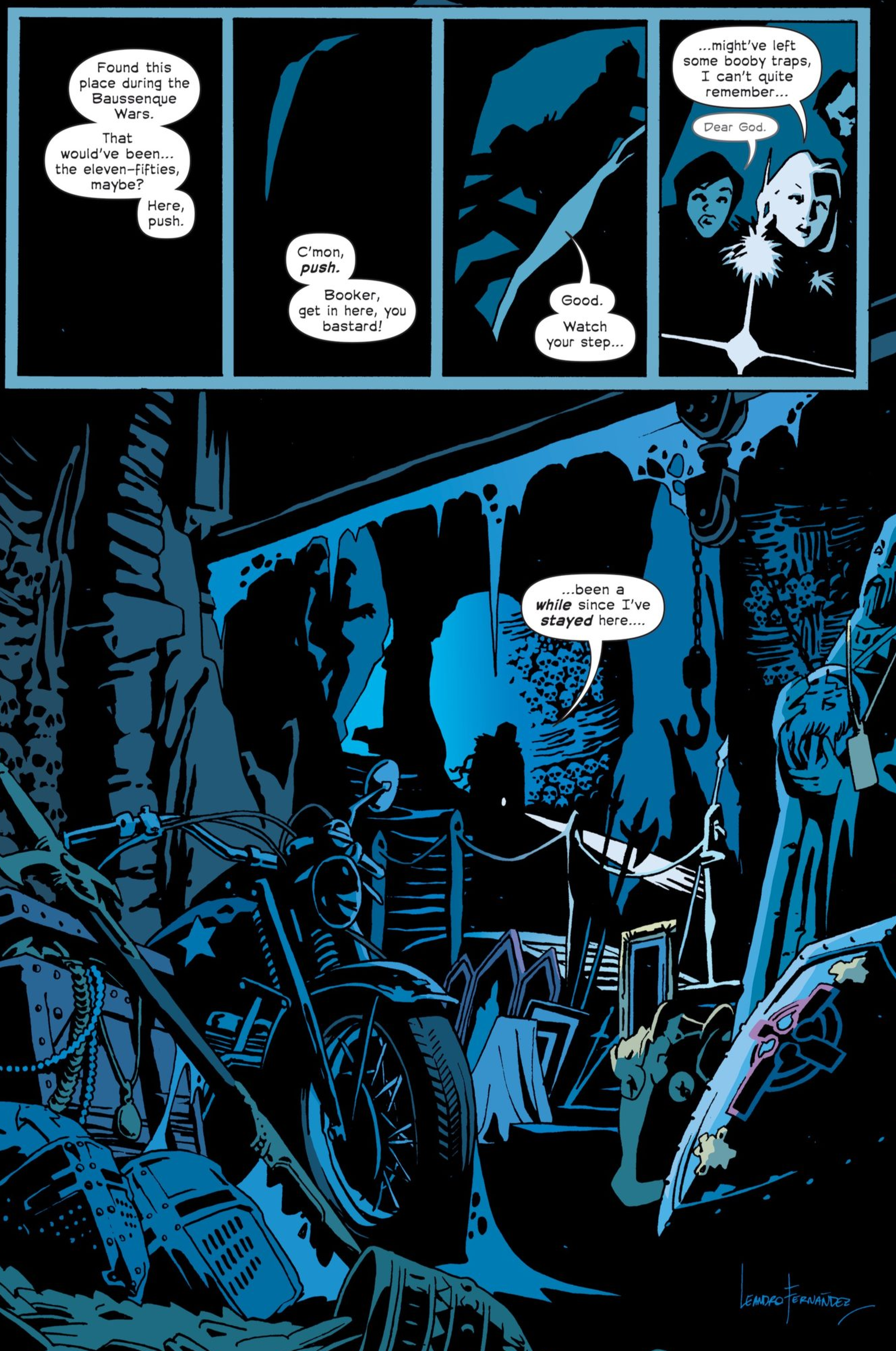

Keep it *tight.*
Get the doors. Rest of you, *cover.*
On three.
One.
Two.
Three--


--son of a *bitch!*
Don't suppose you want to get these *chains* off us?
Get them *out,* get them *out,* get them onto the fucking *plane!*
Guess not.
You'd have thought *one* of those guys would've had the *keys* on them--


--Copley!
Can I assume we're being taken to meet the person who's *paying* for your *betrayal?*
I didn't *betray* you, Nicky.
If you guys had been *honest* with me from the *start,* we wouldn't *be* here.
Actually, I suspect we'd have been here *sooner.*
You know, whoever your employer is, he's going to be *disappointed,* James.
He's *not* going to find what he's looking for.
I think you underestimate his *commitment.* It'll be easier for you if you don't *fight.*
Joseph and I have *no* illusions about what's going to happen to us.
Even if we *wanted* to, we won't be able to help him.
But that leaves me with a *question* for you...
...what happens when your employer's *frustration* inevitably outmatches his *greed?*


LES BAUX-DE-PROVENCE.
You gonna tell us where we're going?
You'll find out soon enough.
Why you like *that?*
Like *what,* Nile?
With the secrets and all that.
It's *safer.*
Yeah, sure's done you all a fuckton of good.
Hey, Booker?
You awake?
Oui.
What happened to your *family,* man? Andy said I should *ask* you.
Did she?
Go ahead. Tell Nile why I don't want her writing any letters *home.*


Ah. *That.*
Andy wants me to tell you that keeping in touch with your family risks ***exposing*** all of us.
Which is entirely ***true.***
That is ***not*** the ***real*** reason.
The real reason is to protect your ***heart.***
You will watch ***all*** of them die, Nile. You will watch ***everyone*** you have loved pass away.
And if you try to touch their lives they will ask ***questions,*** and through your answers they will learn your ***secret.***
And they will ask you to ***share*** it with them.
And you will not be ***able*** to.
And they will ***curse*** your name. They will ***beg,*** they will ***implore.*** They will not ***believe*** you when you say you ***cannot*** help them.
And so they will grow ***desperate.***
And in ***desperation,*** they will do things to forever ***taint*** your memory of them.
And they will ***still*** die.
And you will ***never*** forget what they ***became*** before they ***did.***
We're here.


Found this place during the Baussenque Wars.
That would've been... the eleven-fifties, maybe?
Here, push.
C'mon, **push.**
Booker, get in here, you bastard!
Good.
Watch your step...
...might've left some booby traps, I can't quite remember...
Dear God.
...been a ***while*** since I've ***stayed*** here....
LEANDRO FERNANDEZ

Leandro Fernández
Daniela Miwa

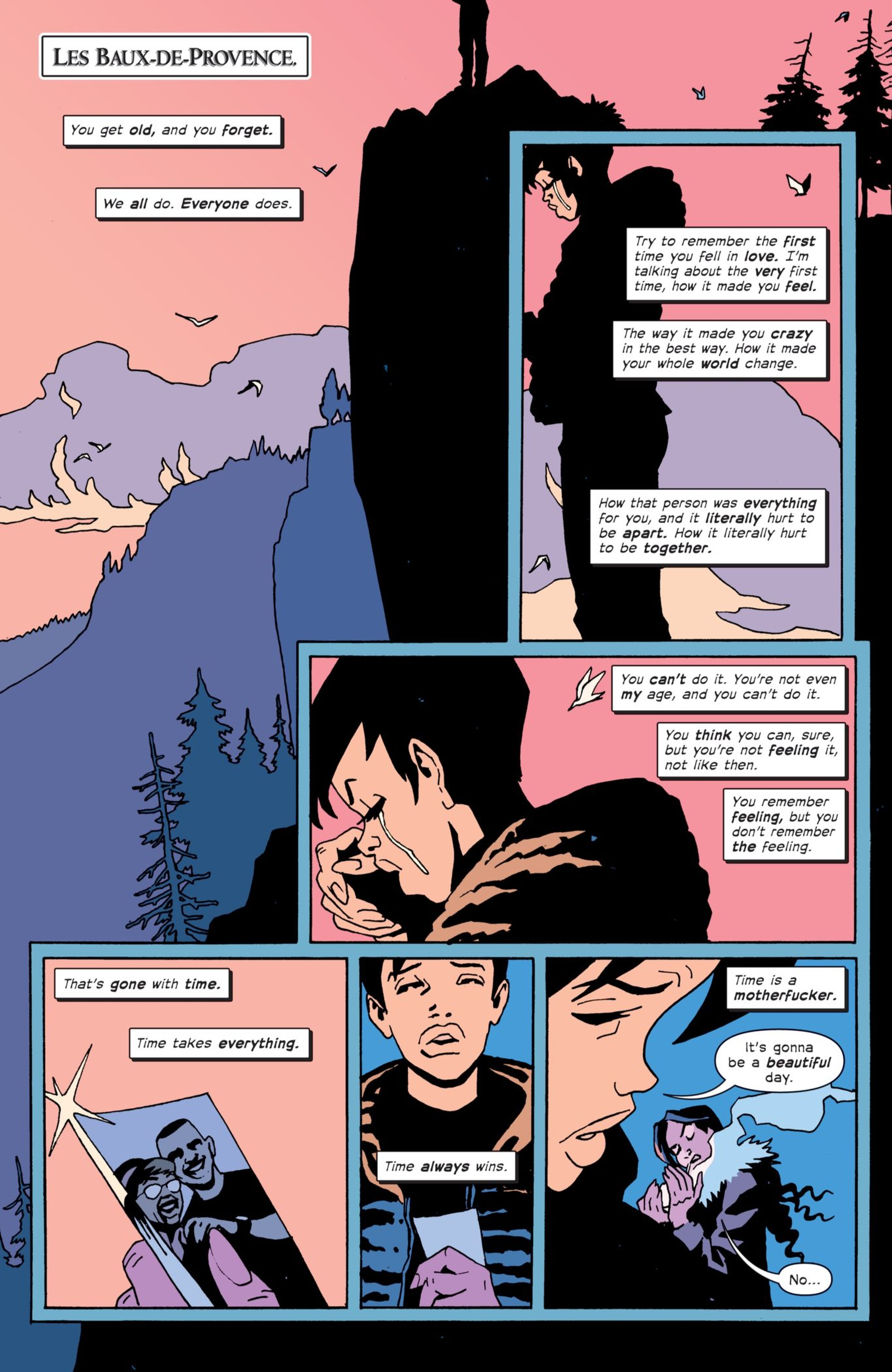
CHAPTER FOUR

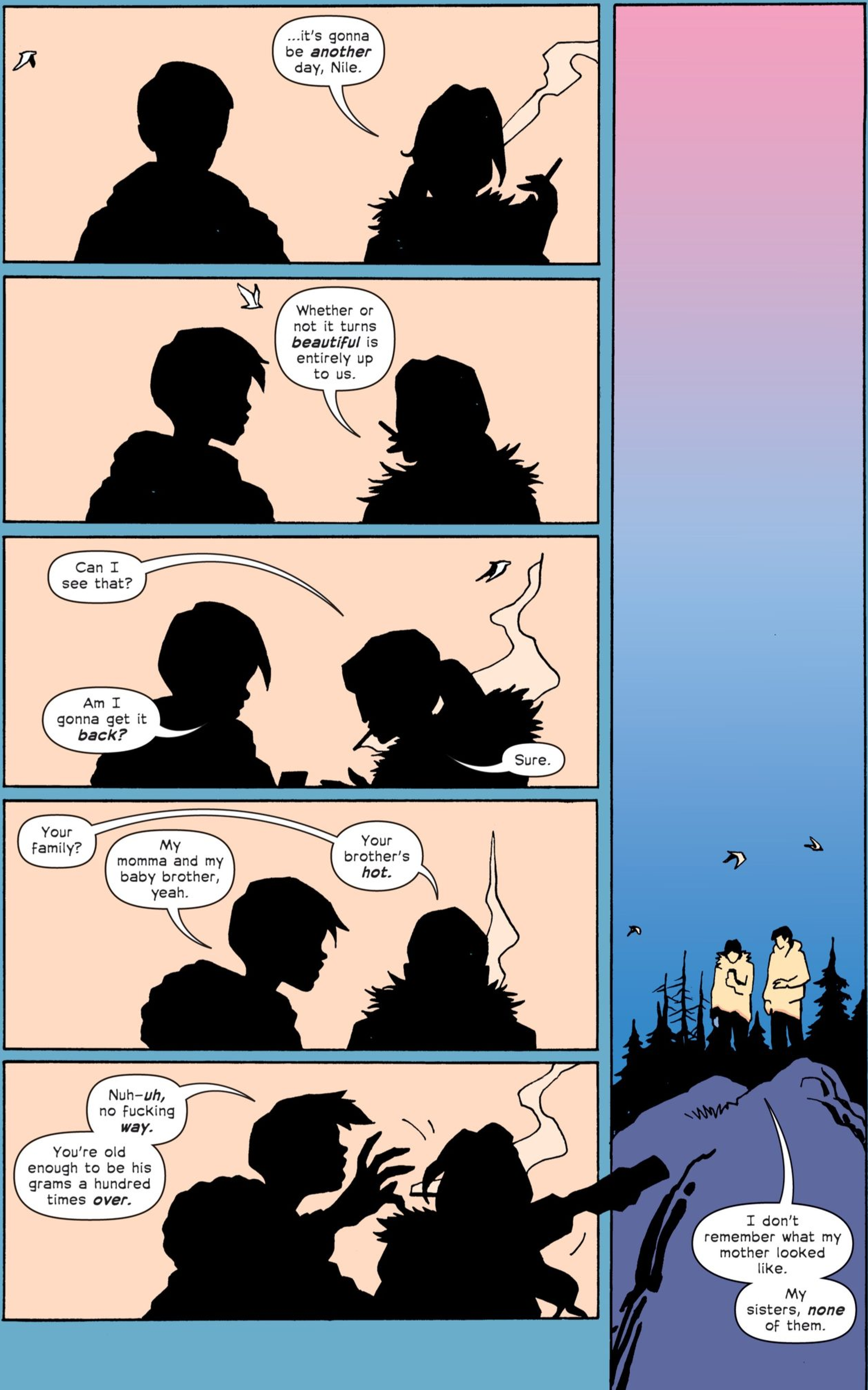
“**Love** is like **War**;

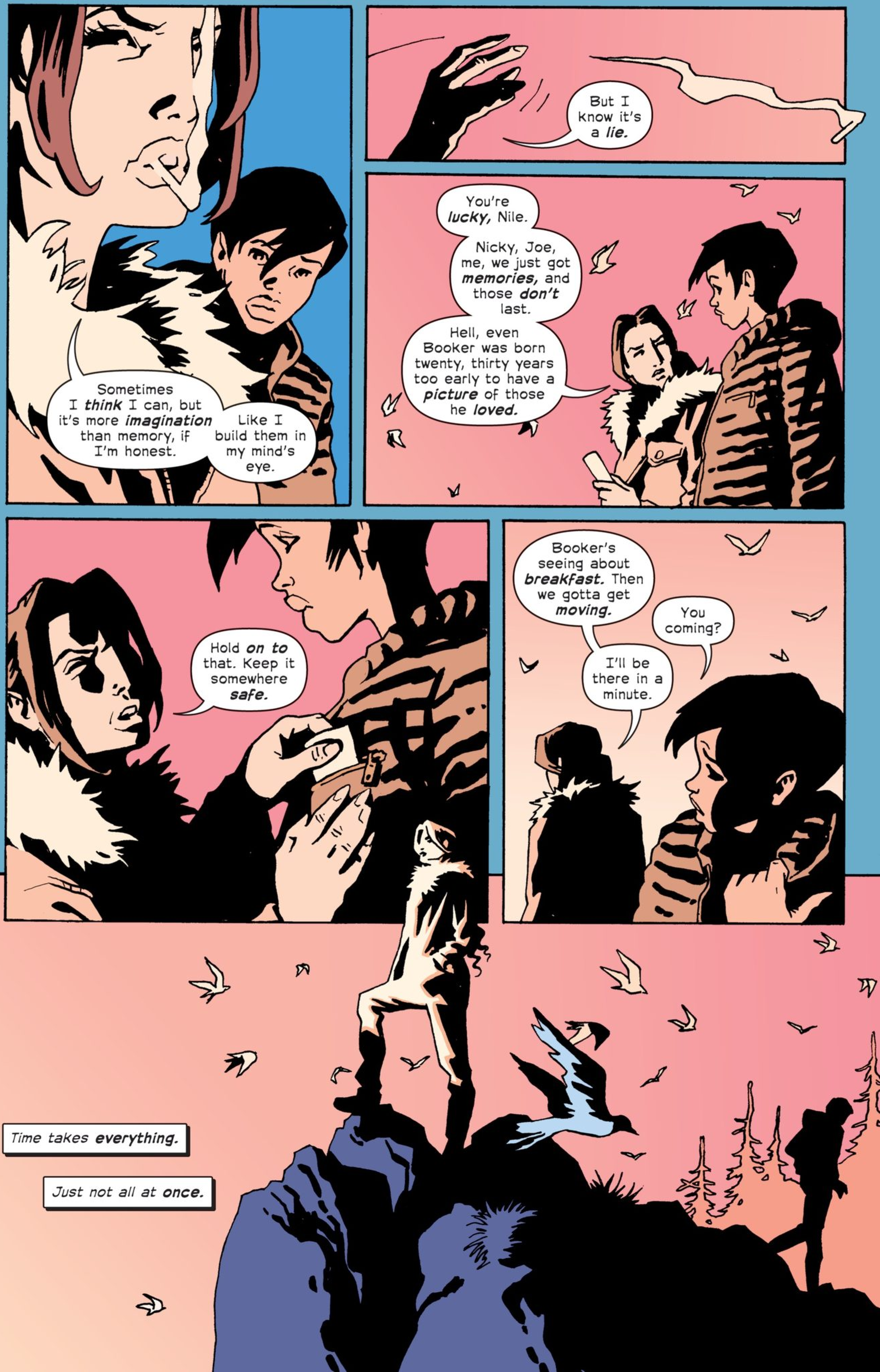
easy to **Begin**

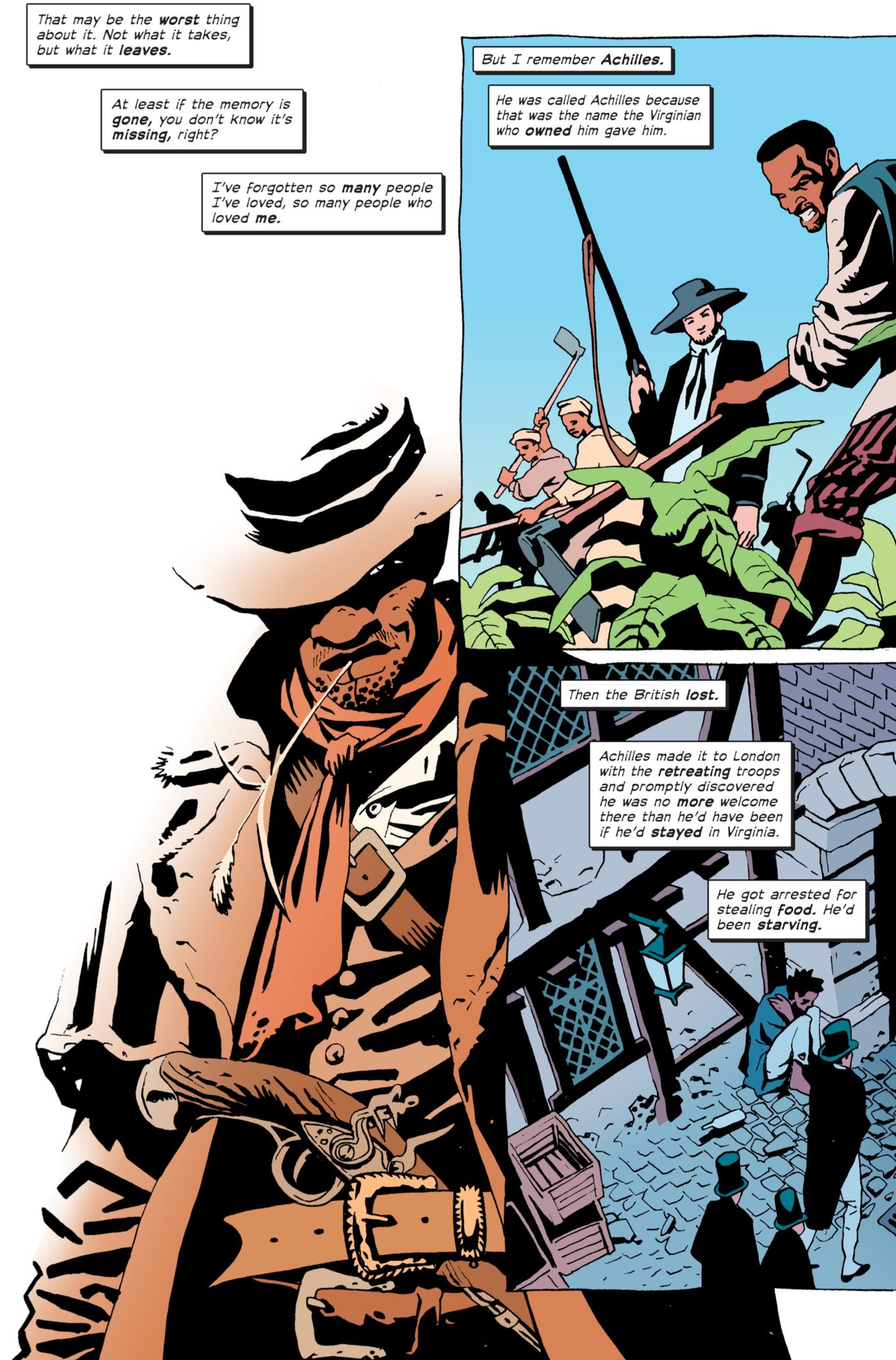
but very hard to **Stop**.”

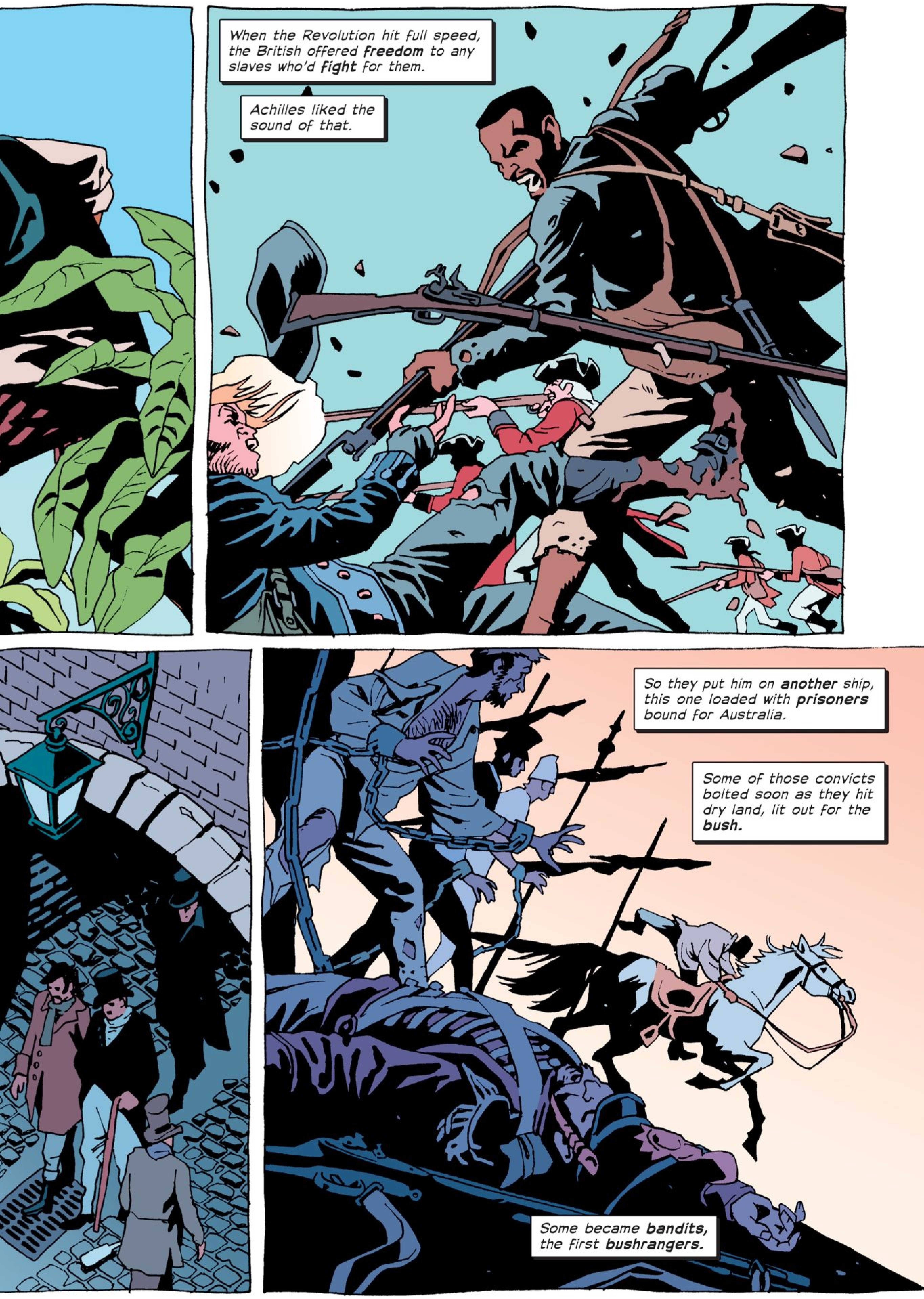
~H.L. Mencken

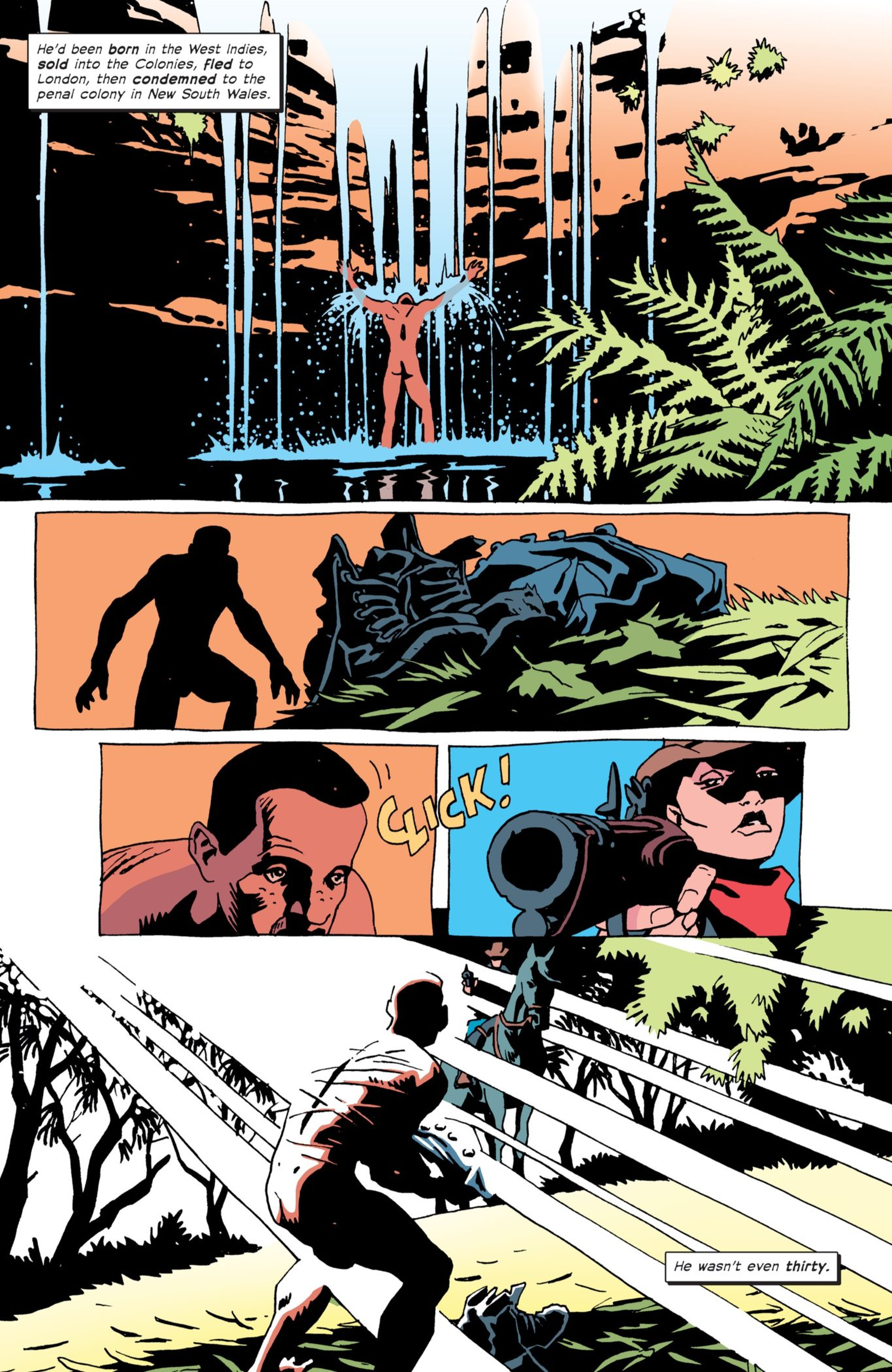

LES BAUX-DE-PROVENCE.
You get **old,** and you **forget.**
We **all** do. **Everyone** does.
Try to remember the **first** time you fell in **love.** I'm talking about the **very** first time, how it made you **feel.**
The way it made you **crazy** in the best way. How it made your whole **world** change.
How that person was **everything** for you, and it **literally** hurt to be **apart.** How it literally hurt to be **together.**
You **can't** do it. You're not even **my** age, and you can't do it.
You **think** you can, sure, but you're not **feeling** it, not like then.
You remember **feeling,** but you don't remember **the** feeling.
That's **gone** with **time.**
Time takes **everything.**
Time **always** wins.
Time is a **motherfucker.**
It's gonna be a **beautiful** day.
No...

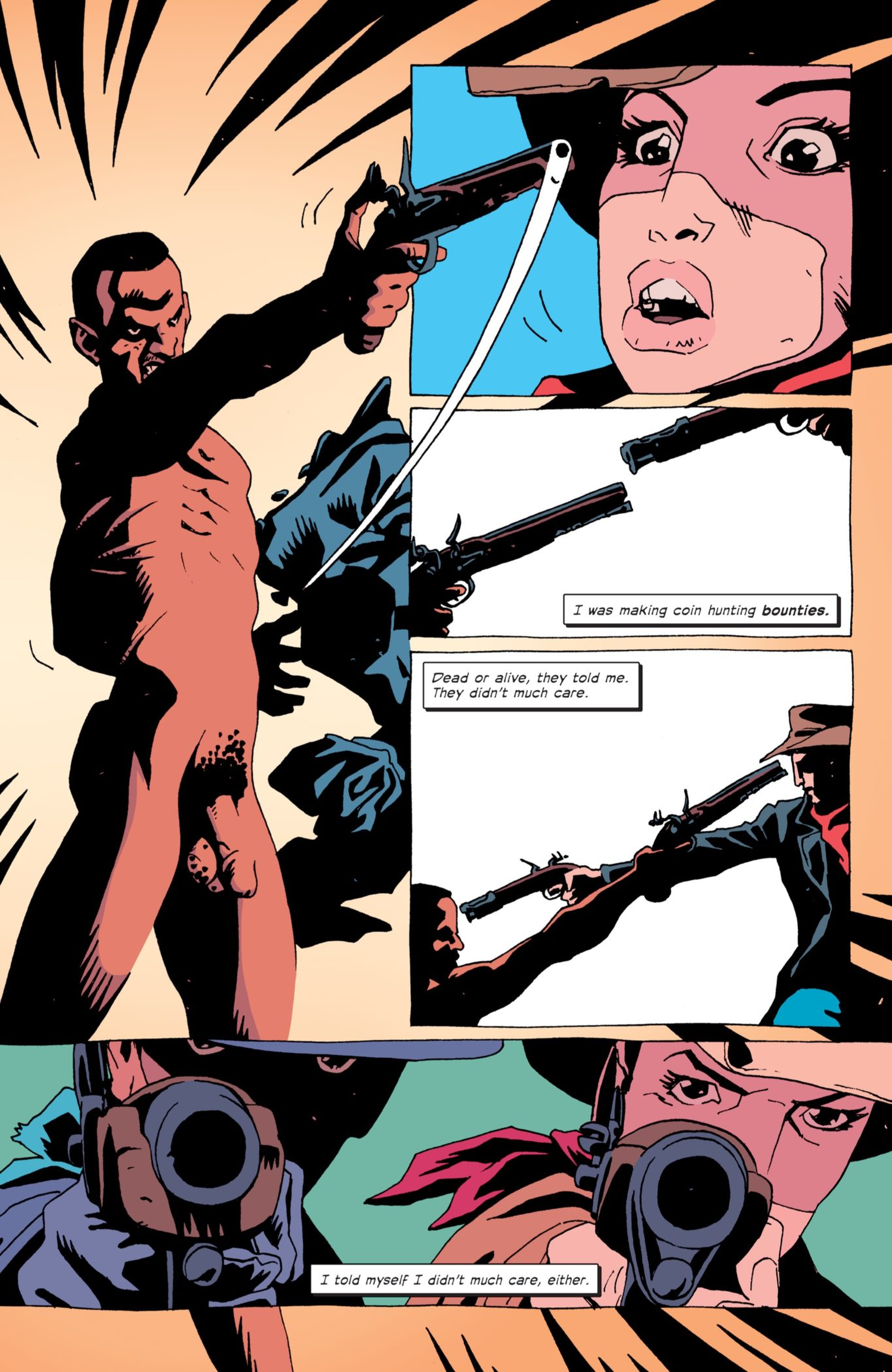

...it's gonna be *another* day, Nile.
Whether or not it turns *beautiful* is entirely up to us.
Can I see that?
Am I gonna get it *back?*
Sure.
Your family?
My momma and my baby brother, yeah.
Your brother's *hot.*
Nuh-*uh,* no fucking *way.*
You're old enough to be his grams a hundred times *over.*
I don't remember what my mother looked like.
My sisters, *none* of them.

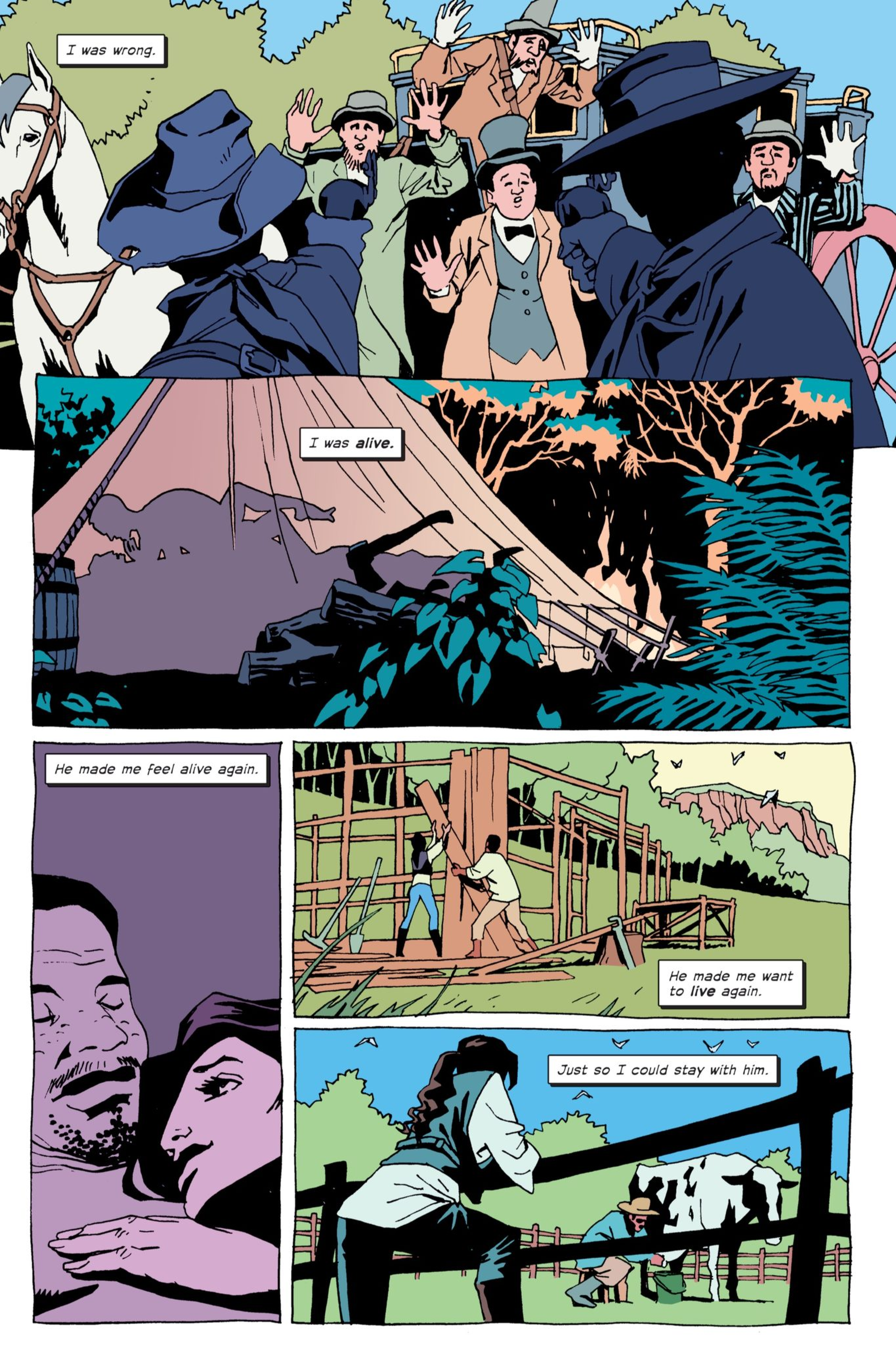

Sometimes I *think* I can, but it's more *imagination* than memory, if I'm honest.
Like I build them in my mind's eye.
But I know it's a *lie.*
You're *lucky,* Nile.
Nicky, Joe, me, we just got *memories,* and those *don't* last.
Hell, even Booker was born twenty, thirty years too early to have a *picture* of those he *loved.*
Hold *on to* that. Keep it somewhere *safe.*
Booker's seeing about *breakfast.* Then we gotta get *moving.*
You coming?
I'll be there in a minute.
Time takes ***everything.***
Just not all at ***once.***

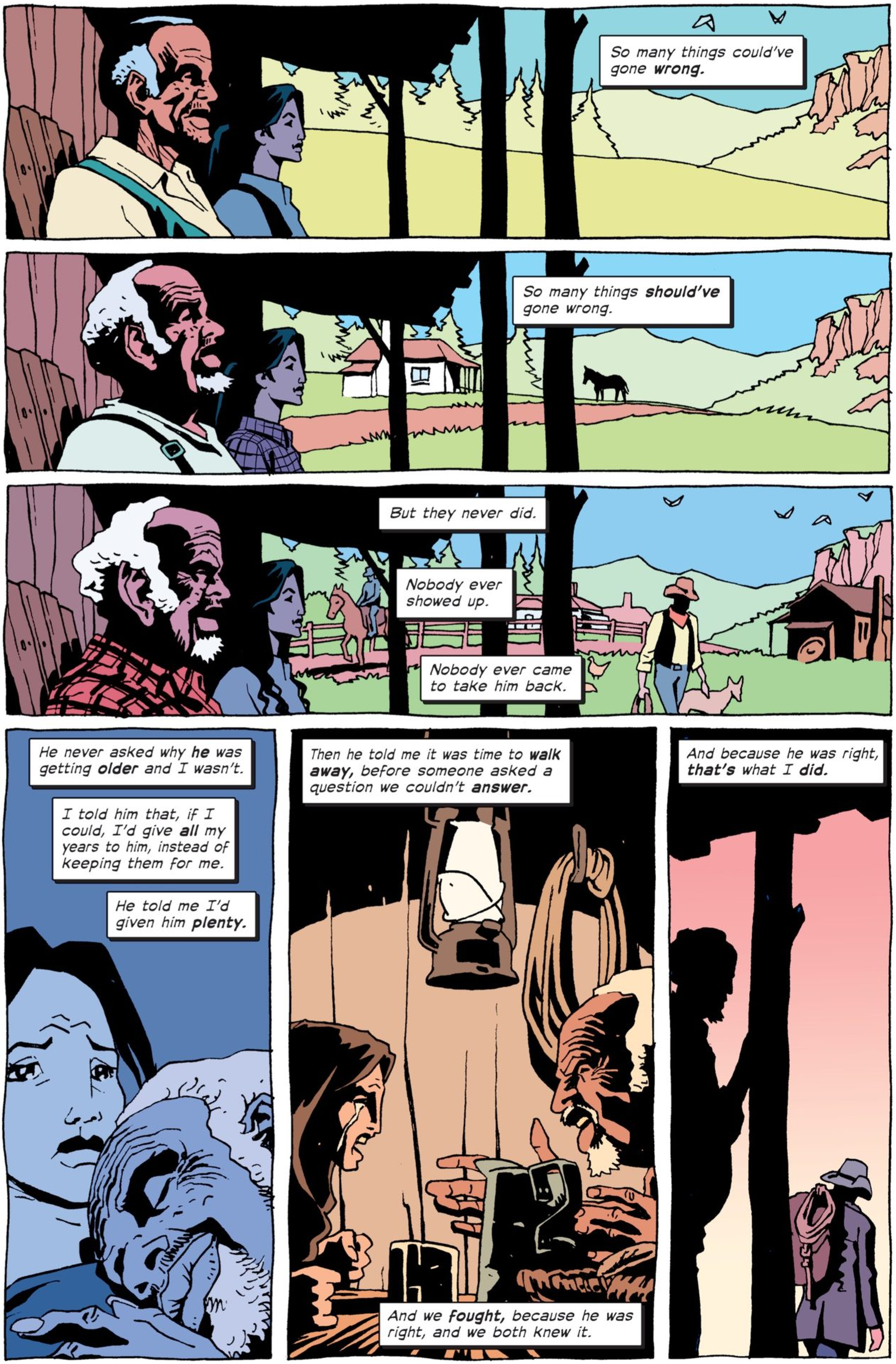

That may be the **worst** thing about it. Not what it takes, but what it **leaves.**
At least if the memory is **gone,** you don't know it's **missing,** right?
I've forgotten so **many** people I've loved, so many people who loved **me.**
But I remember **Achilles.**
He was called Achilles because that was the name the Virginian who **owned** him gave him.
Then the British **lost.**
Achilles made it to London with the **retreating** troops and promptly discovered he was no **more** welcome there than he'd have been if he'd **stayed** in Virginia.
He got arrested for stealing **food.** He'd been **starving.**

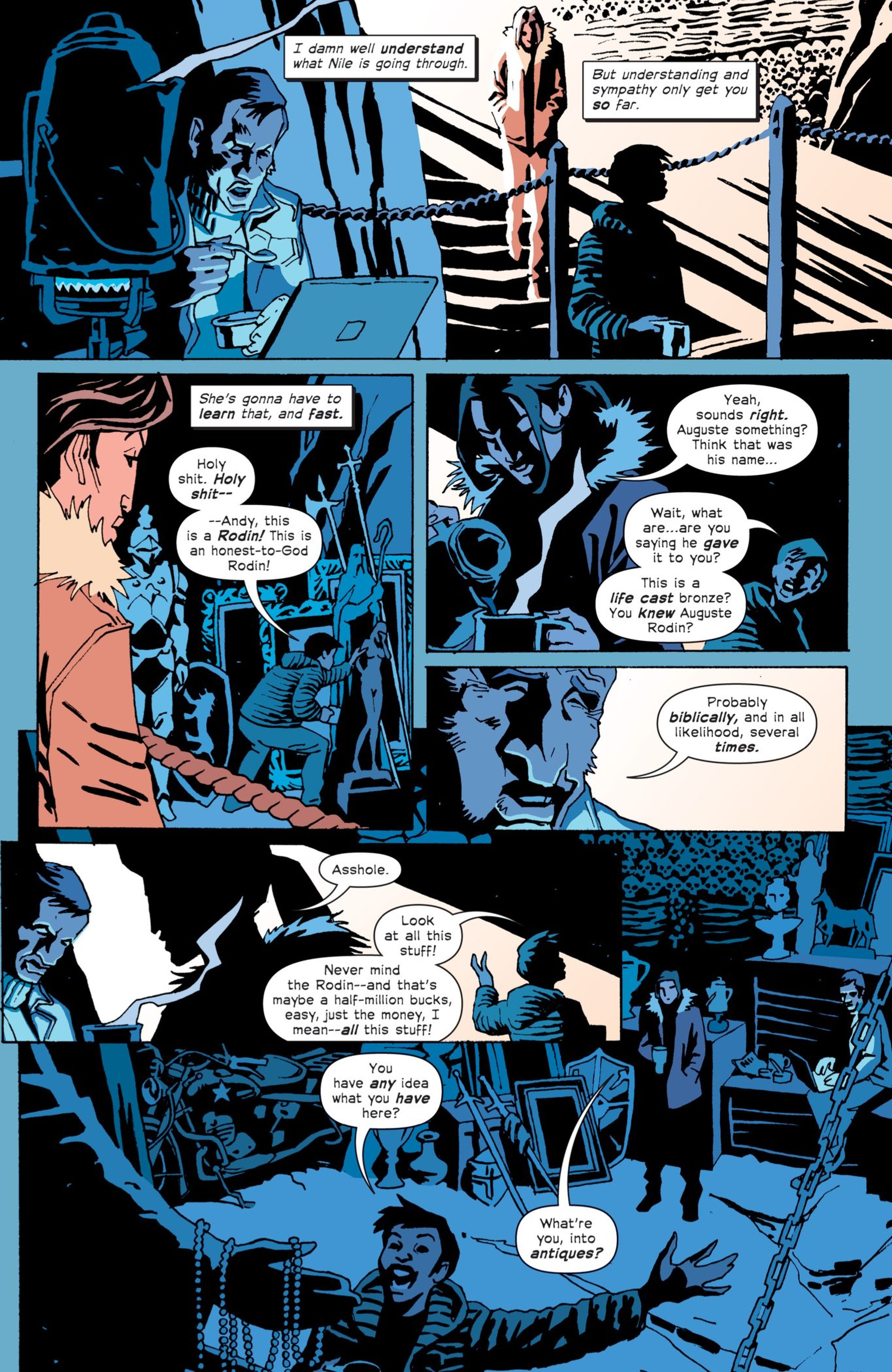

When the Revolution hit full speed, the British offered **freedom** to any slaves who'd **fight** for them.
Achilles liked the sound of that.
So they put him on **another** ship, this one loaded with **prisoners** bound for Australia.
Some of those convicts bolted soon as they hit dry land, lit out for the **bush.**
Some became **bandits,** the first **bushrangers.**

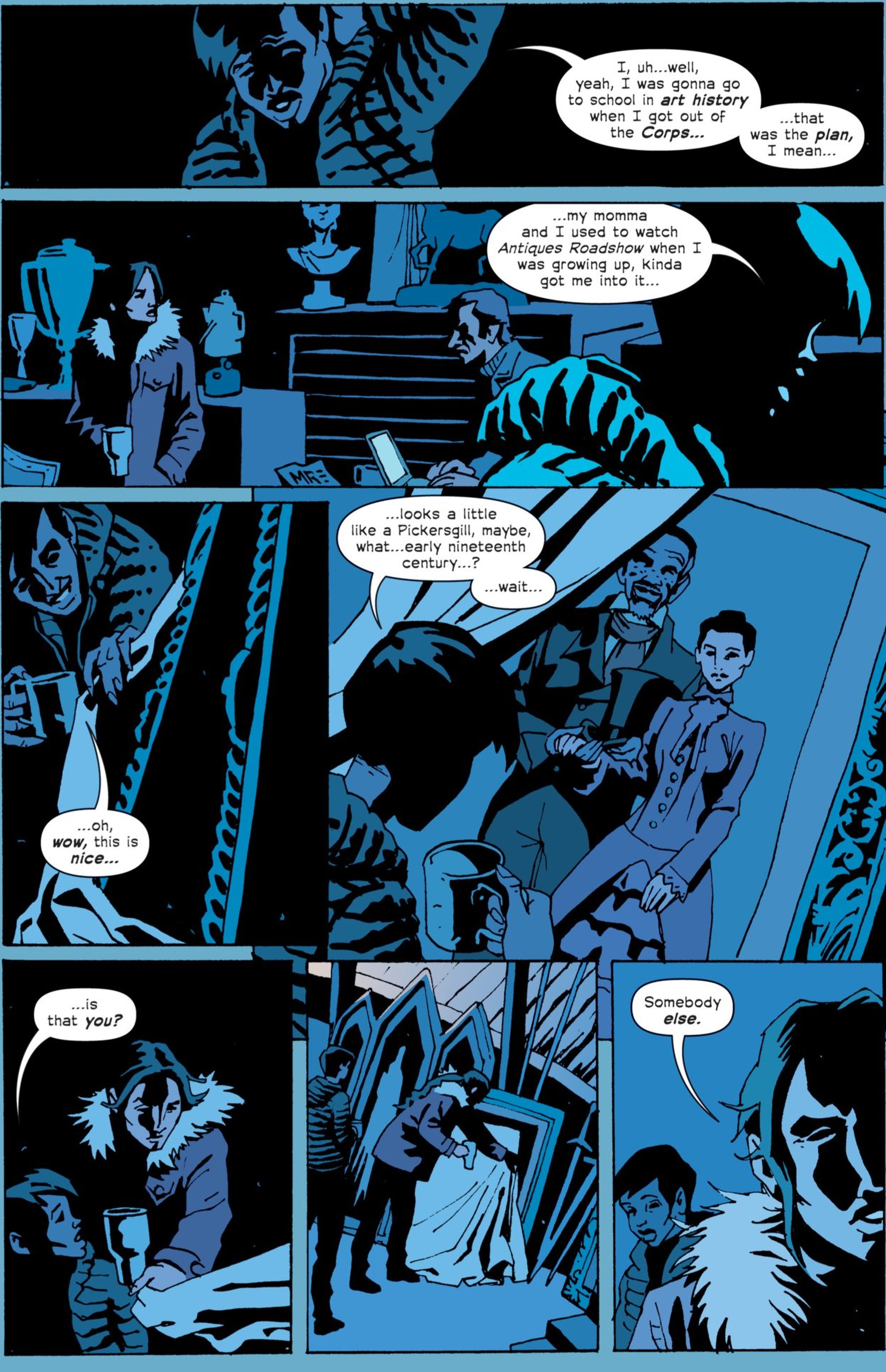

He'd been **born** in the West Indies, **sold** into the Colonies, **fled** to London, then **condemned** to the penal colony in New South Wales.
CLICK!
He wasn't even **thirty.**

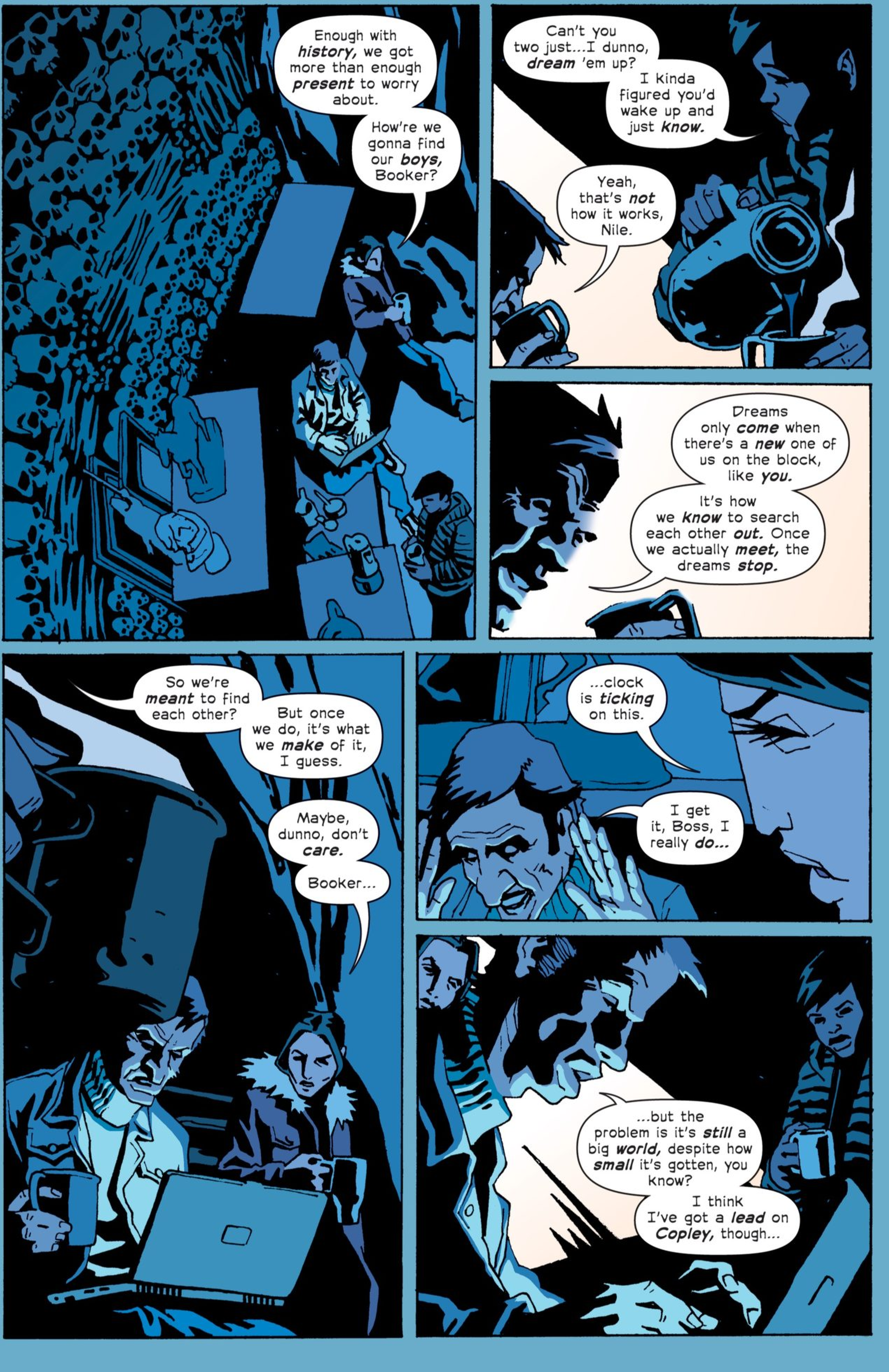

I was making coin hunting **bounties.**
Dead or alive, they told me. They didn't much care.
I told myself I didn't much care, either.

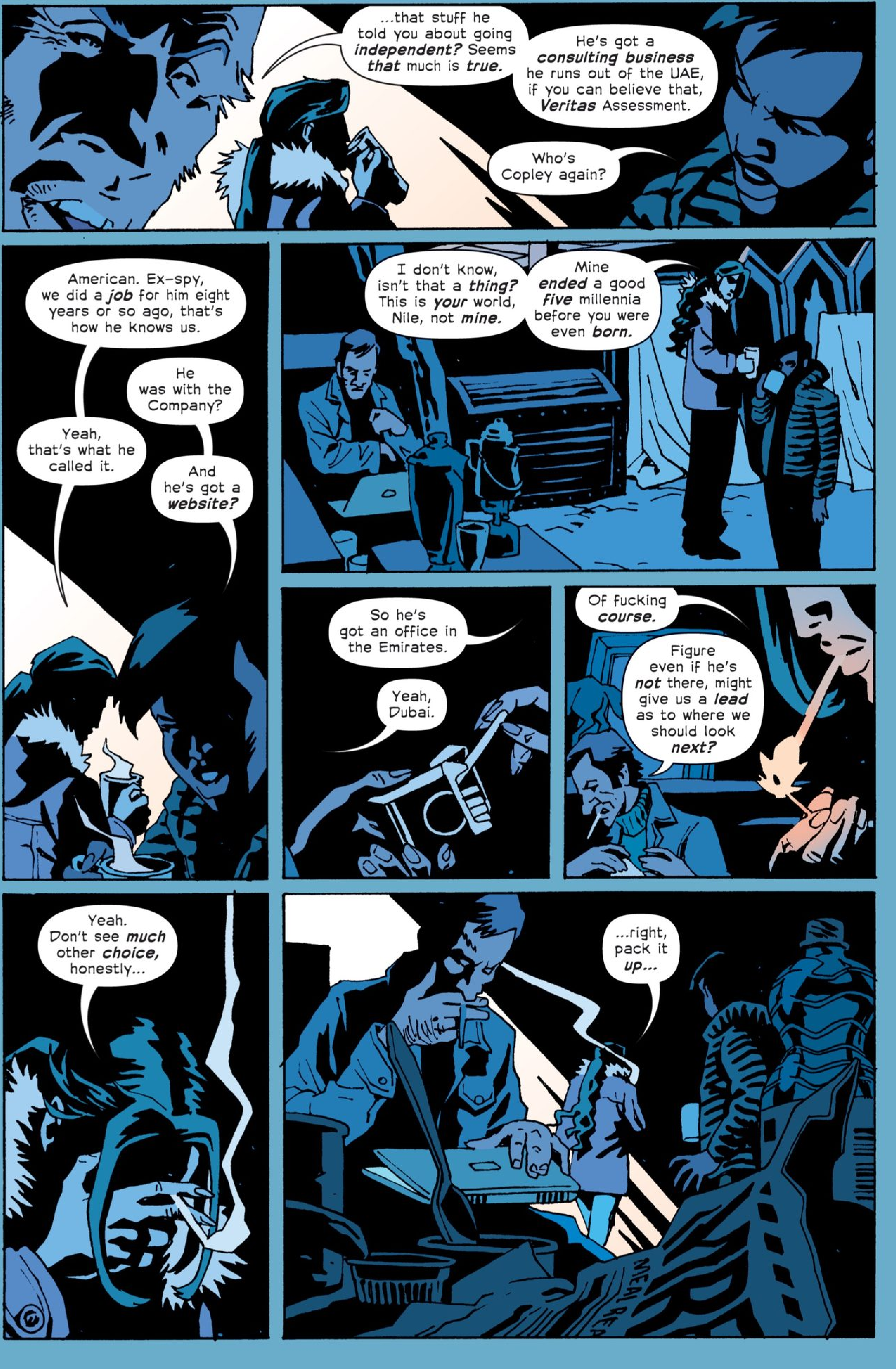

I was wrong.
I was **alive.**
He made me feel alive again.
He made me want to **live** again.
Just so I could stay with him.

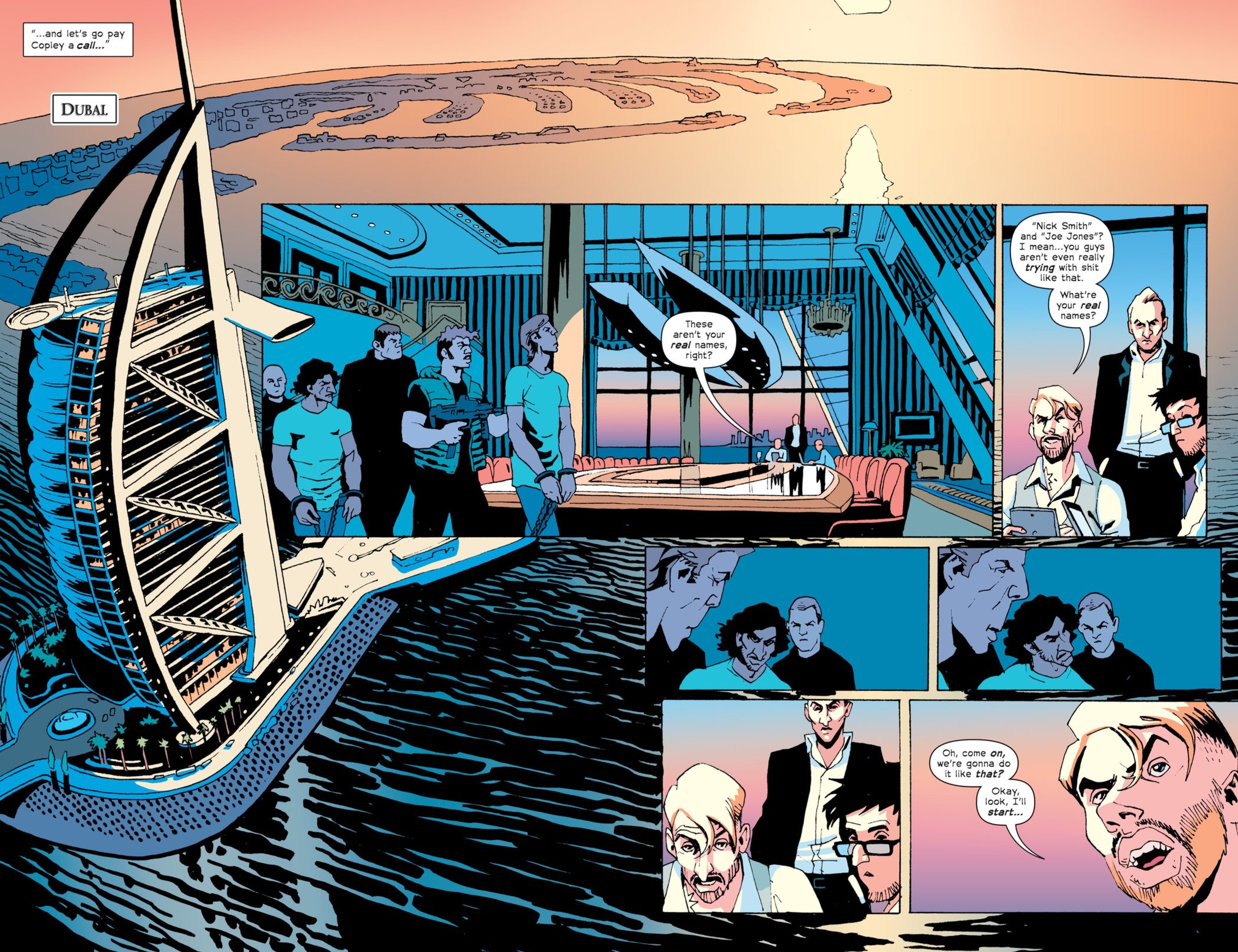

So many things could've gone **wrong.**
So many things **should've** gone wrong.
But they never did.
Nobody ever showed up.
Nobody ever came to take him back.
He never asked why **he** was getting **older** and I wasn't.
I told him that, if I could, I'd give **all** my years to him, instead of keeping them for me.
He told me I'd given him **plenty.**
Then he told me it was time to **walk away,** before someone asked a question we couldn't **answer.**
And we **fought,** because he was right, and we both knew it.
And because he was right, **that's** what I **did.**

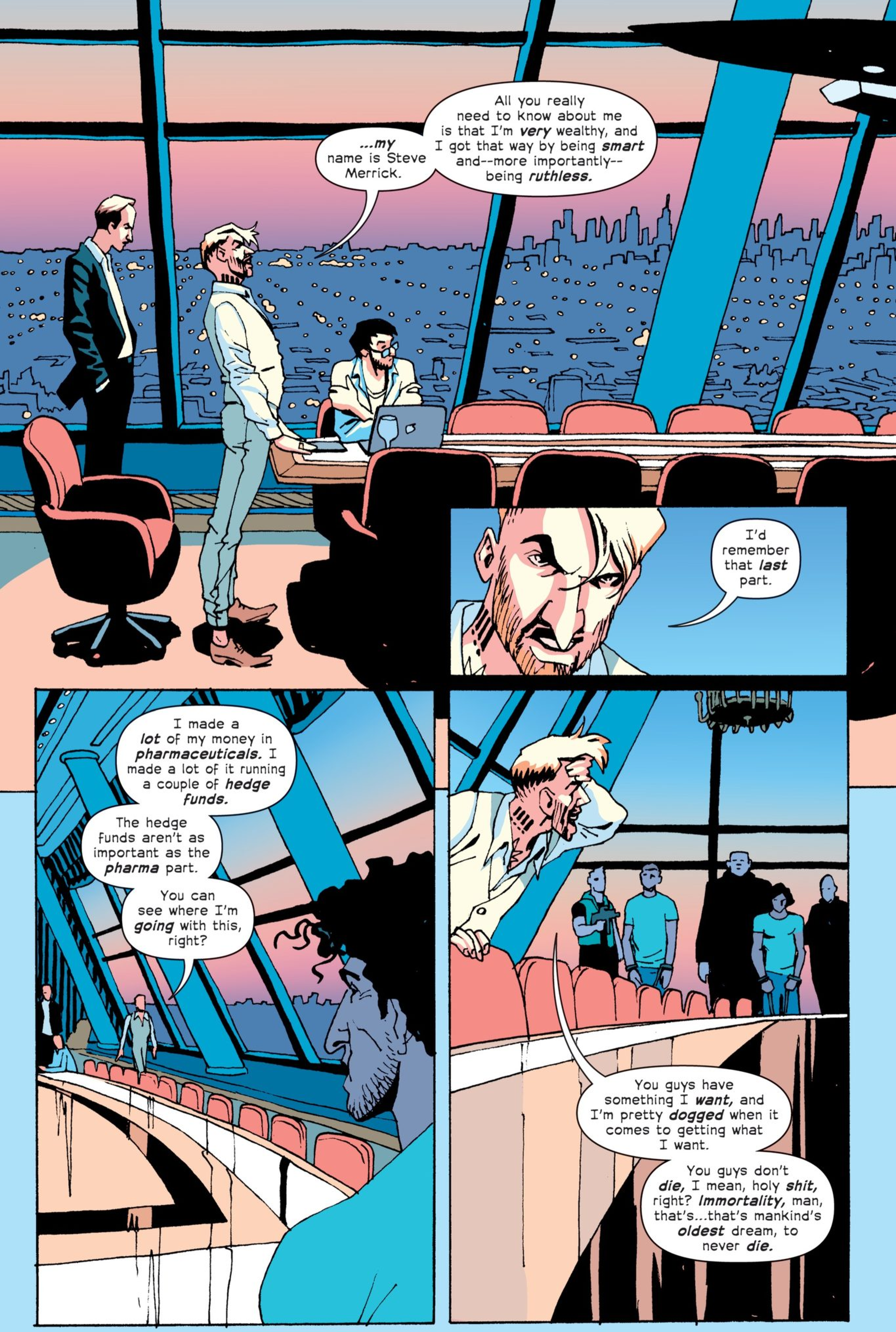

I damn well **understand** what Nile is going through.
But understanding and sympathy only get you **so** far.
She's gonna have to **learn** that, and **fast.**
Holy shit. ***Holy shit***--
--Andy, this is a ***Rodin!*** This is an honest-to-God Rodin!
Yeah, sounds ***right.*** Auguste something? Think that was his name...
Wait, what are...are you saying he ***gave*** it to you?
This is a ***life cast*** bronze? You ***knew*** Auguste Rodin?
Probably ***biblically,*** and in all likelihood, several ***times.***
Asshole.
Look at all this stuff!
Never mind the Rodin--and that's maybe a half-million bucks, easy, just the money, I mean--***all*** this stuff!
You have ***any*** idea what you ***have*** here?
What're you, into ***antiques?***

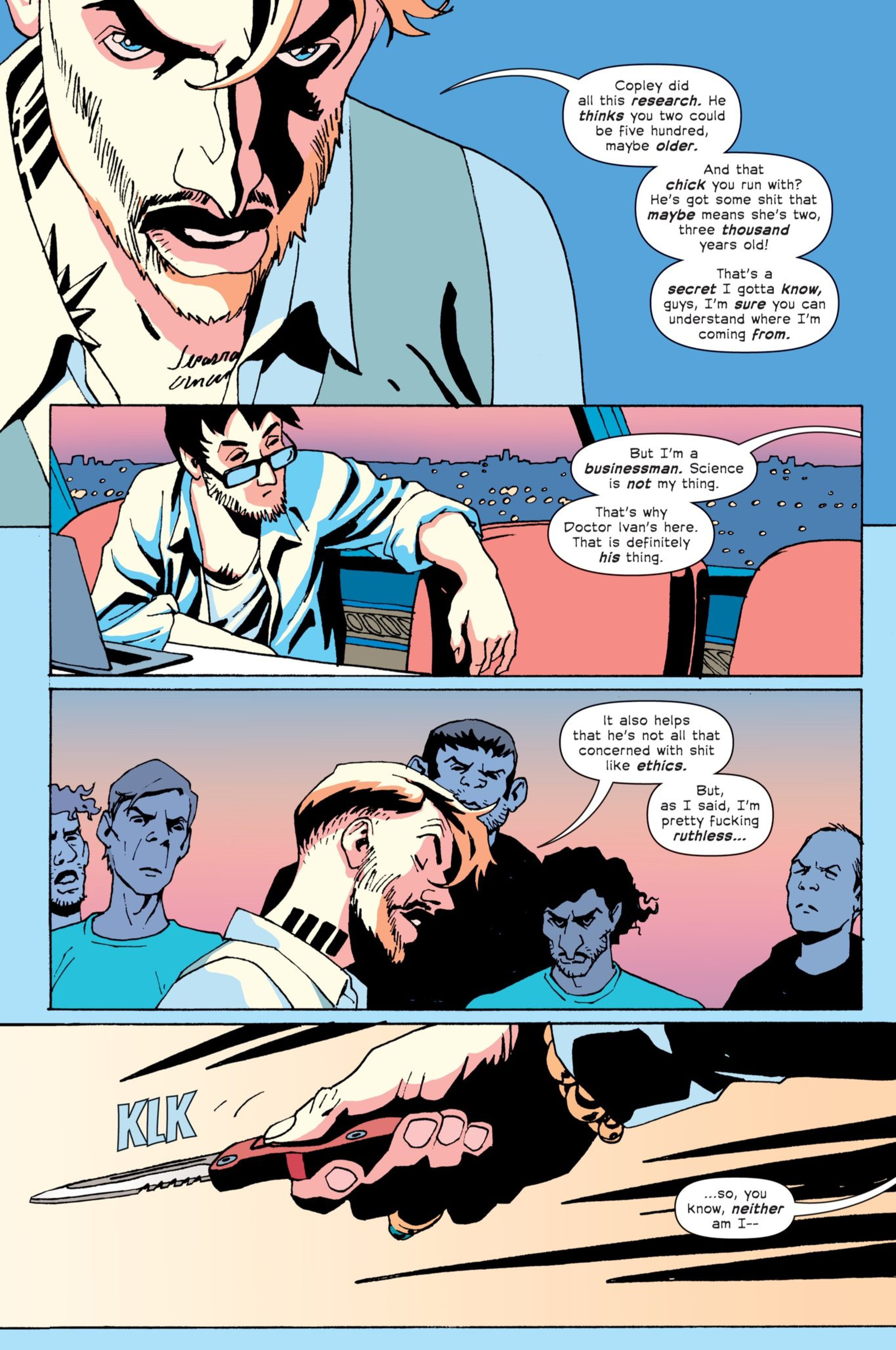

I, uh...well, yeah, I was gonna go to school in ***art history*** when I got out of the ***Corps...***
...that was the ***plan,*** I mean...
...my momma and I used to watch *Antiques Roadshow* when I was growing up, kinda got me into it...
MR.
...oh, ***wow,*** this is ***nice...***
...looks a little like a Pickersgill, maybe, what...early nineteenth century...?
...wait...
...is that ***you?***
Somebody ***else.***

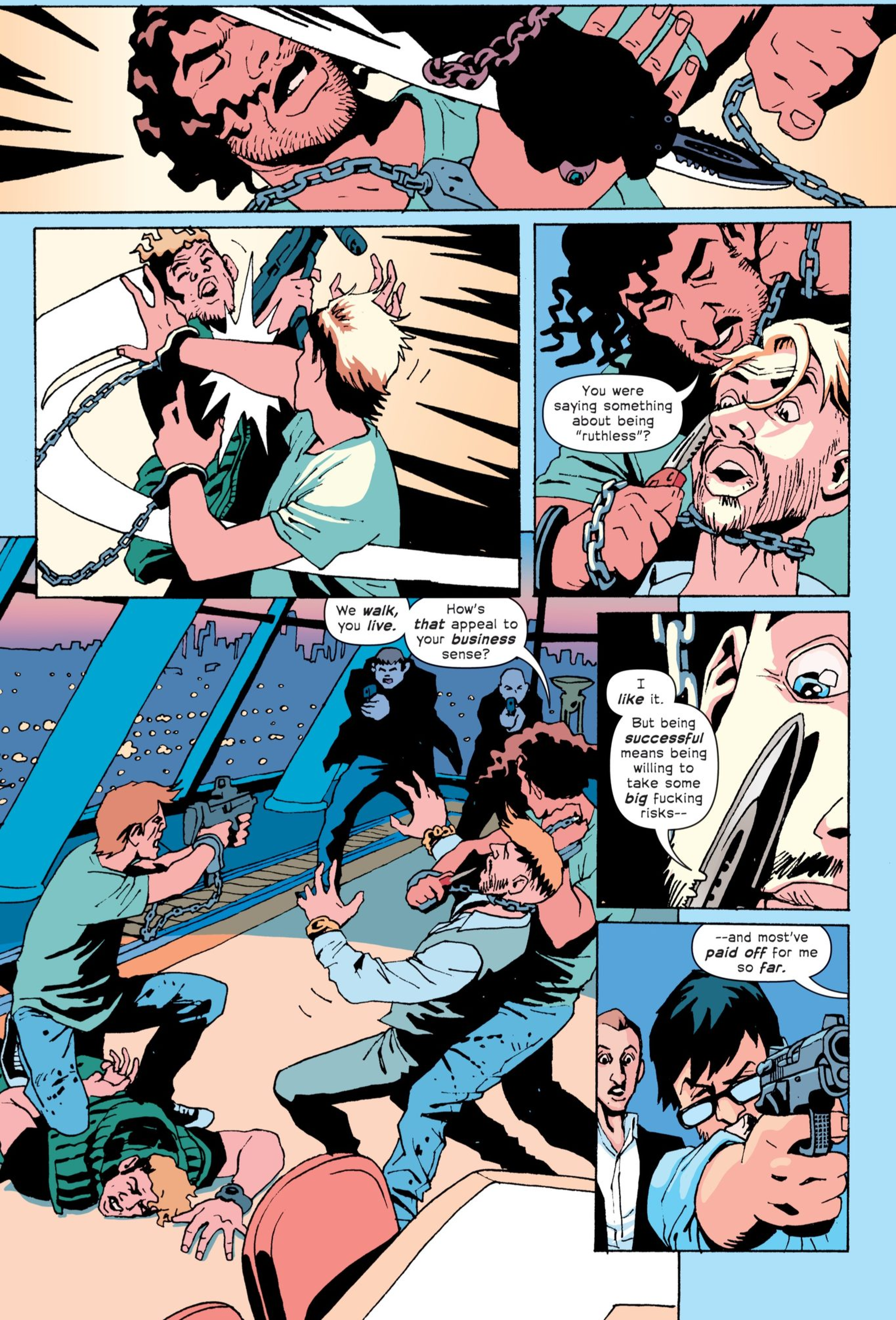

Enough with *history,* we got more than enough *present* to worry about.
How're we gonna find our *boys,* Booker?
Can't you two just...I dunno, *dream* 'em up?
I kinda figured you'd wake up and just *know.*
Yeah, that's *not* how it works, Nile.
Dreams only *come* when there's a *new* one of us on the block, like *you.*
It's how we *know* to search each other *out.* Once we actually *meet,* the dreams *stop.*
So we're *meant* to find each other?
But once we do, it's what we *make* of it, I guess.
Maybe, dunno, don't *care.*
Booker...
...clock is *ticking* on this.
I get it, Boss, I really *do...*
...but the problem is it's *still* a big *world,* despite how *small* it's gotten, you know?
I think I've got a *lead* on *Copley,* though...

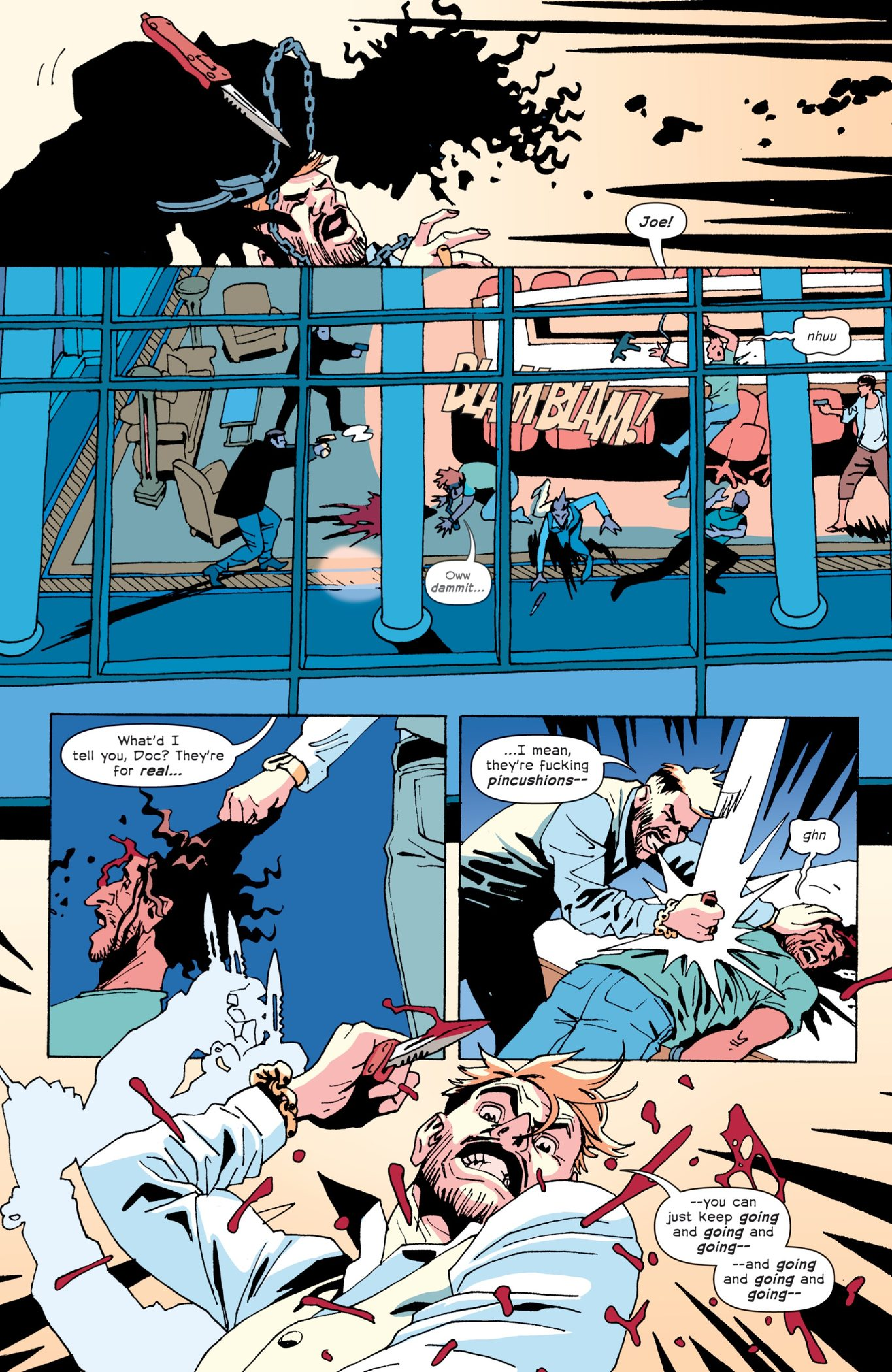

...that stuff he told you about going *independent?* Seems *that* much is *true.*
He's got a *consulting business* he runs out of the UAE, if you can believe that, *Veritas* Assessment.
Who's Copley again?
American. Ex-spy, we did a *job* for him eight years or so ago, that's how he knows us.
He was with the Company?
Yeah, that's what he called it.
And he's got a *website?*
I don't know, isn't that a *thing?* This is *your* world, Nile, not *mine.*
Mine *ended* a good *five* millennia before you were even *born.*
So he's got an office in the Emirates.
Yeah, Dubai.
Of fucking *course.*
Figure even if he's *not* there, might give us a *lead* as to where we should look *next?*
Yeah. Don't see *much* other *choice,* honestly...
...right, pack it *up*...
MEAL READY

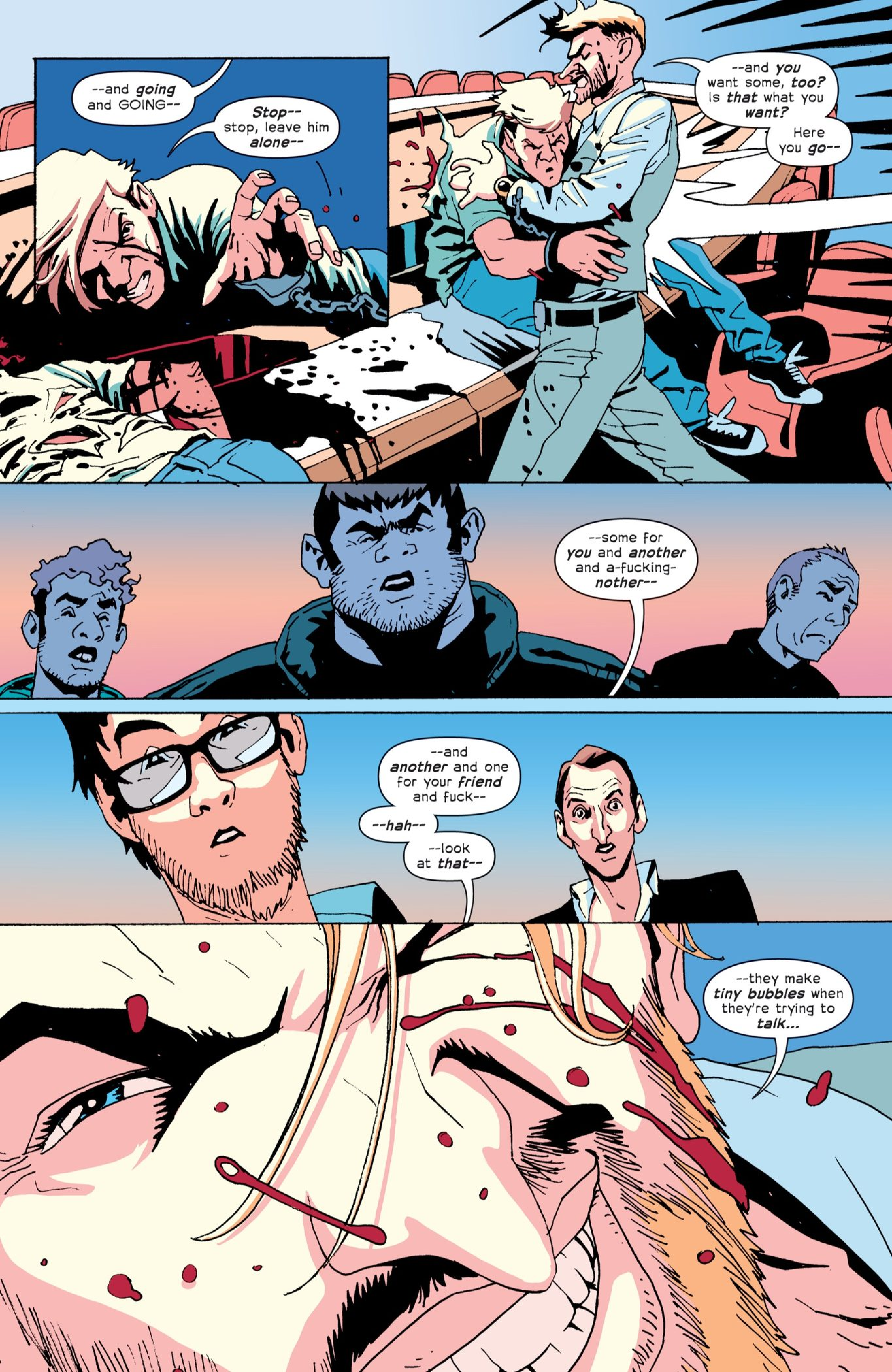

"...and let's go pay Copley a *call...*"
DUBAI.
These aren't your *real* names, right?
"Nick Smith" and "Joe Jones"? I mean...you guys aren't even really *trying* with shit like that.
What're your *real* names?
Oh, come *on,* we're gonna do it like *that?*
Okay, look, I'll *start...*

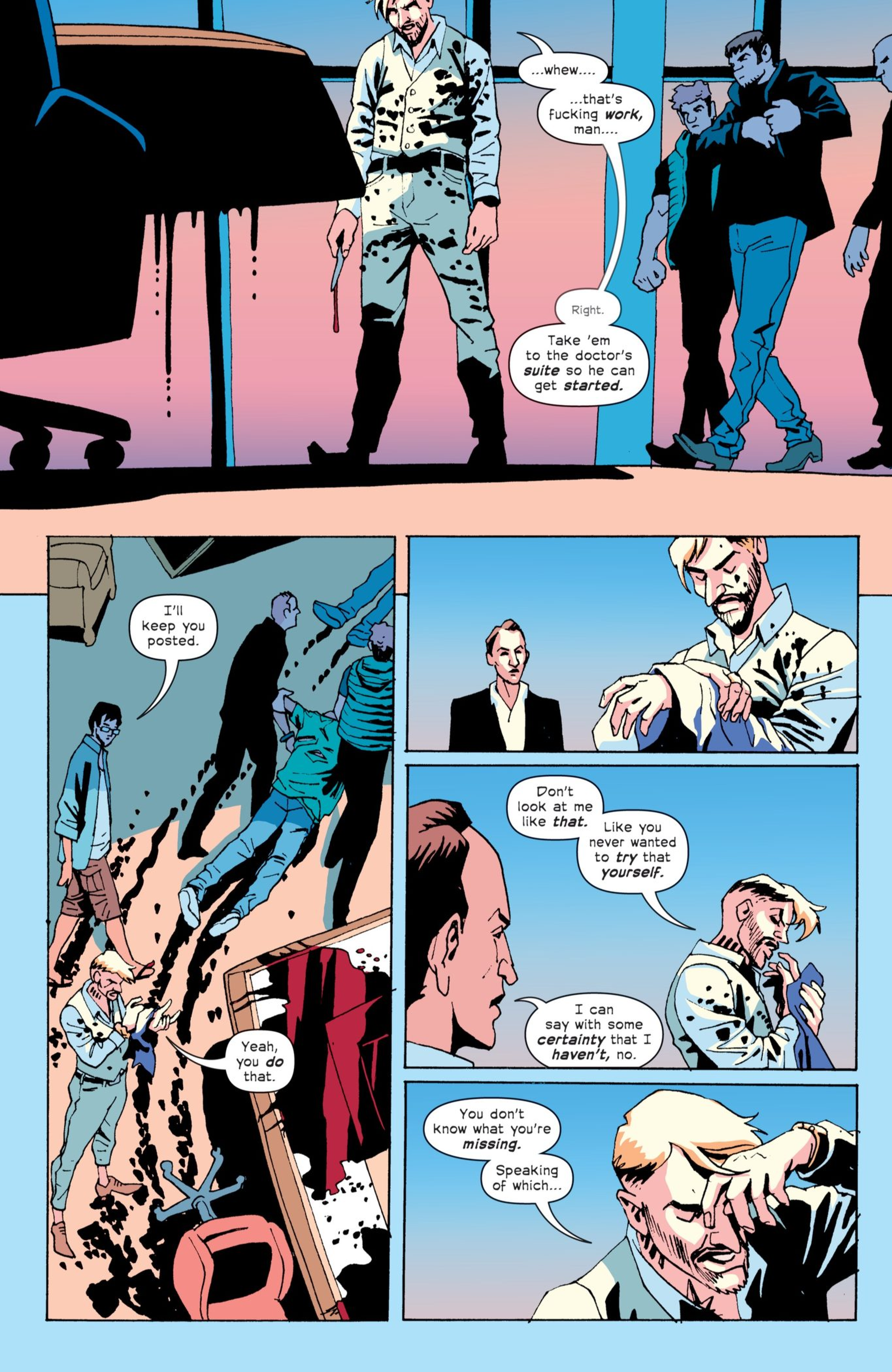

...*my* name is Steve Merrick.
All you really need to know about me is that I'm *very* wealthy, and I got that way by being *smart* and--more importantly--being *ruthless.*
I'd remember that *last* part.
I made a *lot* of my money in *pharmaceuticals.* I made a lot of it running a couple of *hedge funds.*
The hedge funds aren't as important as the *pharma* part.
You can see where I'm *going* with this, right?
You guys have something I *want,* and I'm pretty *dogged* when it comes to getting what I want.
You guys don't *die,* I mean, holy *shit,* right? *Immortality,* man, that's...that's mankind's *oldest* dream, to never *die.*

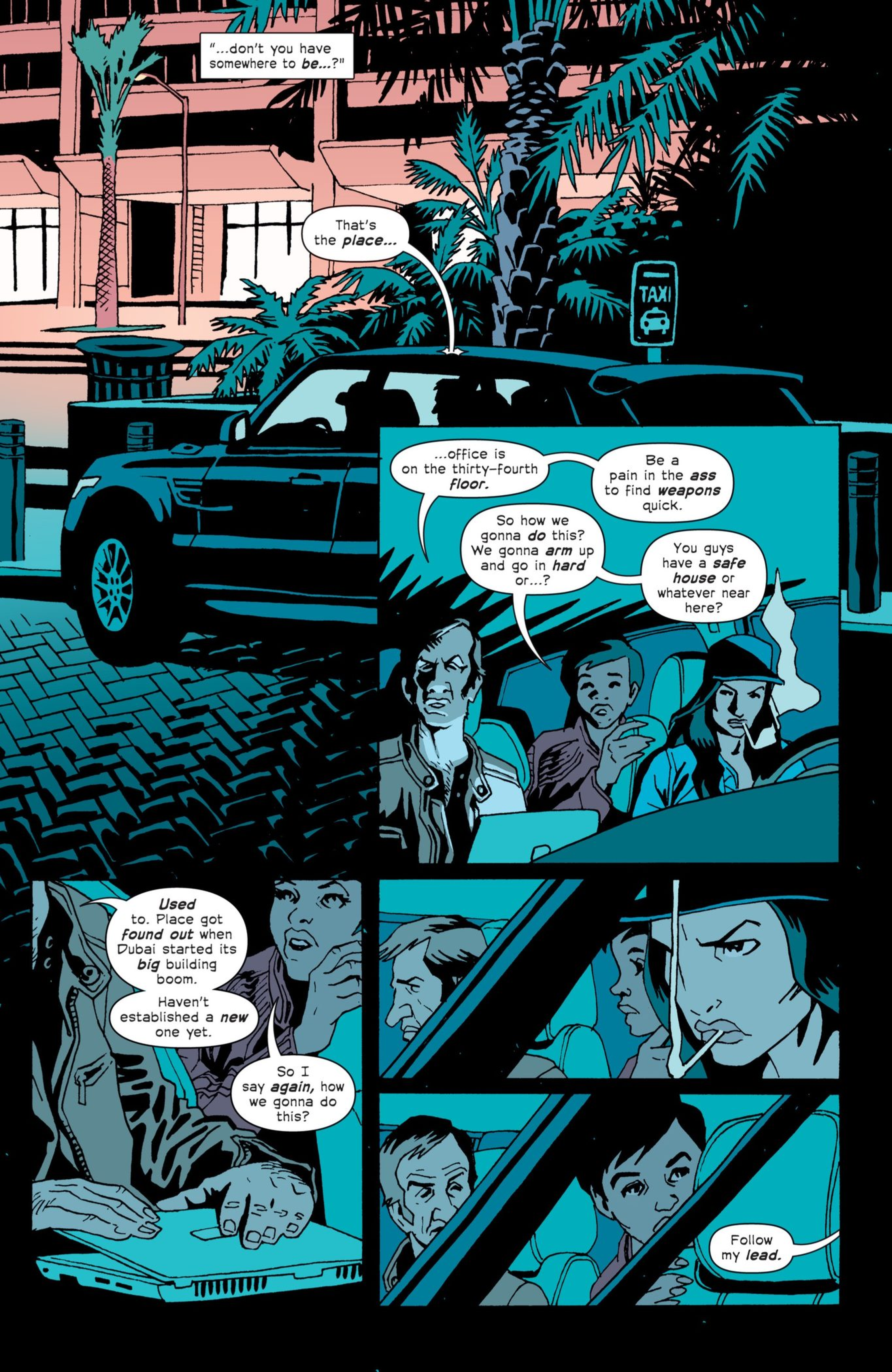

Copley did all this *research.* He *thinks* you two could be five hundred, maybe *older.*
And that *chick* you run with? He's got some shit that *maybe* means she's two, three *thousand* years old!
That's a *secret* I gotta *know,* guys, I'm *sure* you can understand where I'm coming *from.*
But I'm a *businessman.* Science is *not* my thing.
That's why Doctor Ivan's here. That is definitely *his* thing.
It also helps that he's not all that concerned with shit like *ethics.*
But, as I said, I'm pretty fucking *ruthless...*
KLK
...so, you know, *neither* am I--

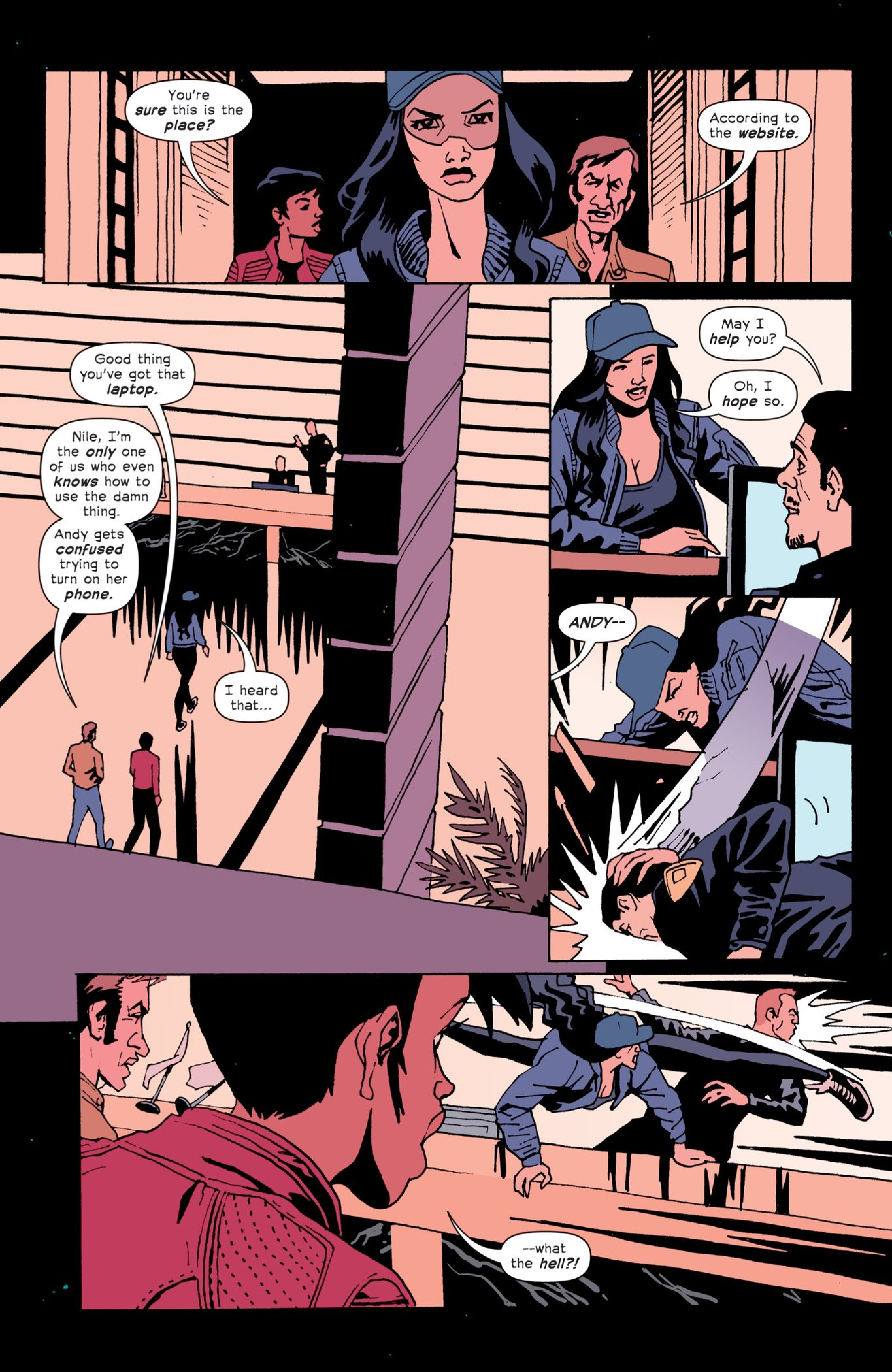

You were saying something about being "ruthless"?
We *walk,* you *live.*
How's *that* appeal to your *business* sense?
I *like* it.
But being *successful* means being willing to take some *big* fucking risks--
--and most've *paid off* for me so *far.*

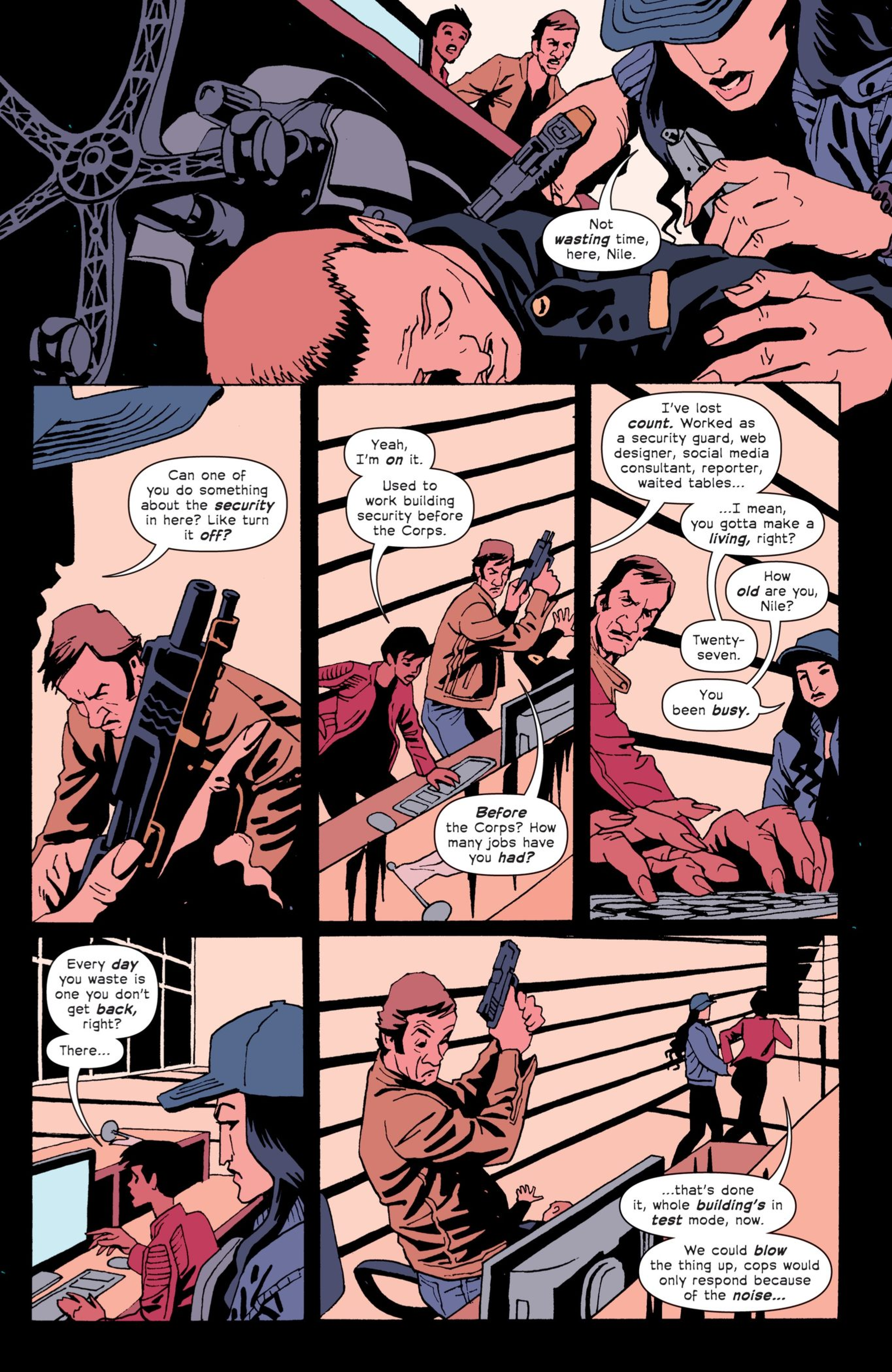

Joe!
nhuu
BLAM BLAM!
Oww dammit...
What'd I tell you, Doc? They're for *real*...
...I mean, they're fucking *pincushions*--
ghn
--you can just keep *going* and *going* and *going*--
--and *going* and *going* and *going*--

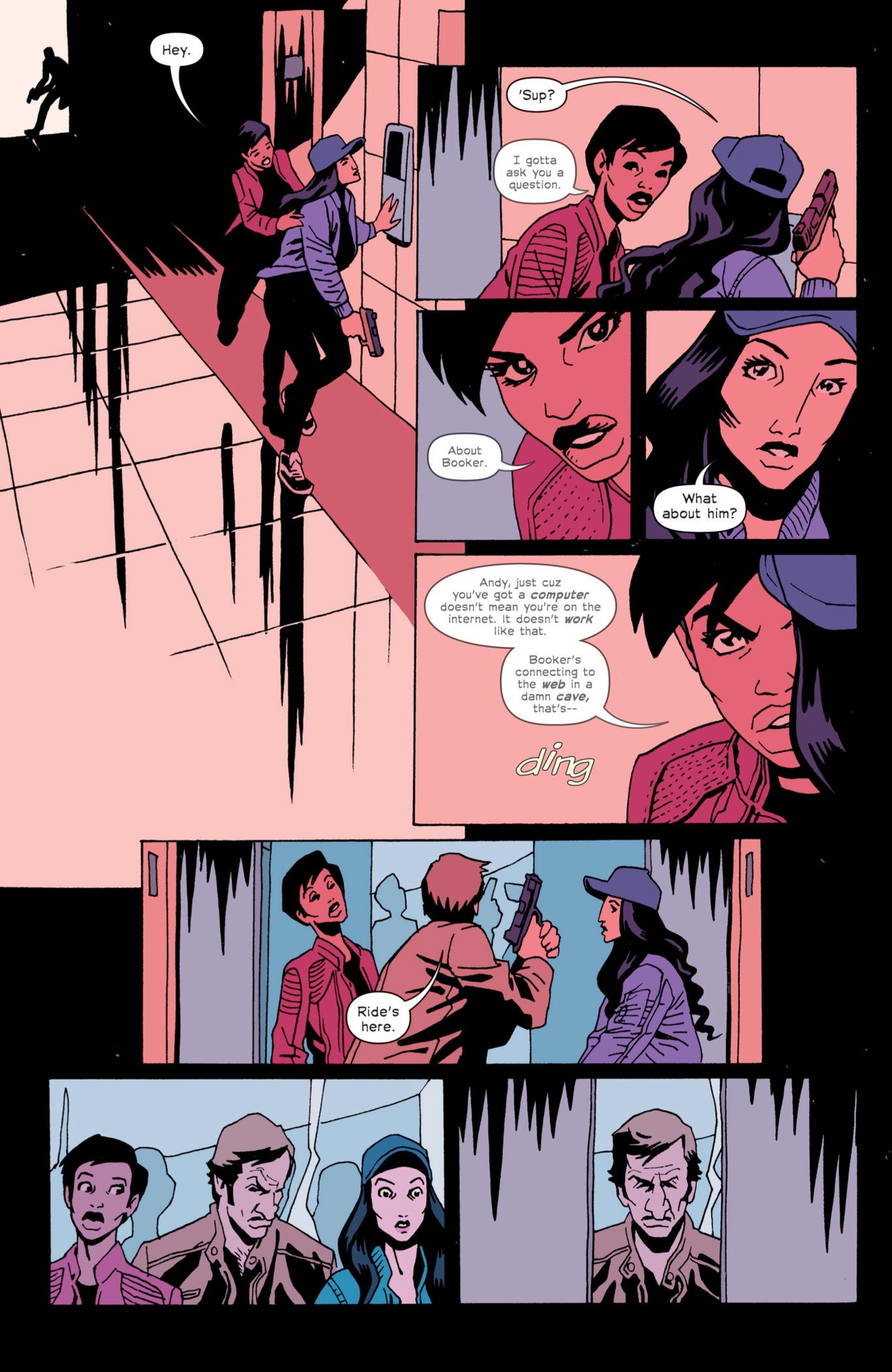

--and *going* and GOING--
Stop-- stop, leave him *alone--*
--and *you* want some, *too?* Is *that* what you *want?*
Here you *go--*
--some for *you* and *another* and a-fucking-*nother--*
--and *another* and one for your *friend* and fuck--
--hah--
--look at *that--*
--they make *tiny bubbles* when they're trying to *talk...*

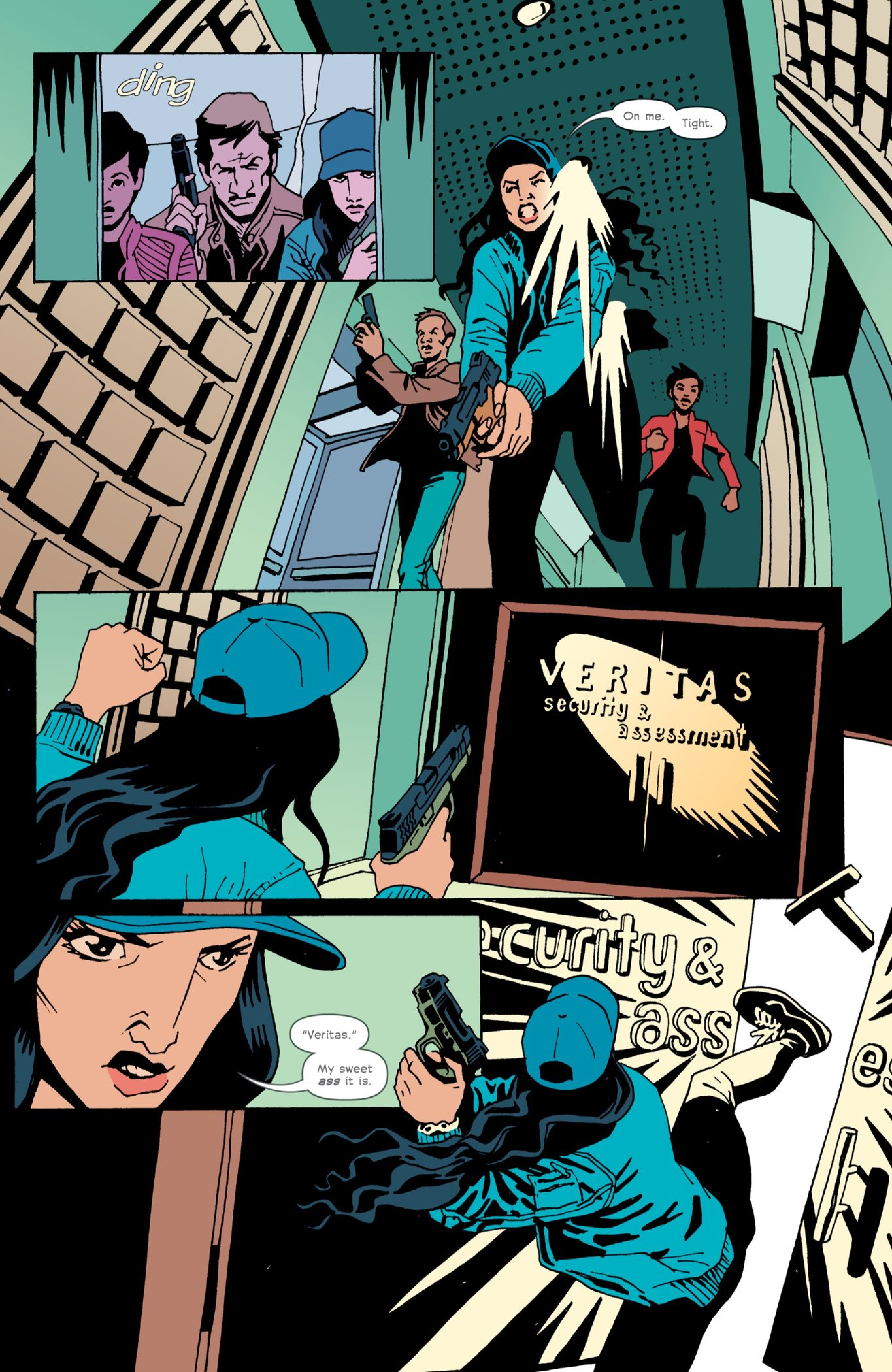

...whew....
...that's fucking *work,* man....
Right.
Take 'em to the doctor's *suite* so he can get *started.*
I'll keep you posted.
Yeah, you *do* that.
Don't look at me like *that.*
Like you never wanted to *try* that *yourself.*
I can say with some *certainty* that I *haven't,* no.
You don't know what you're *missing.*
Speaking of which...

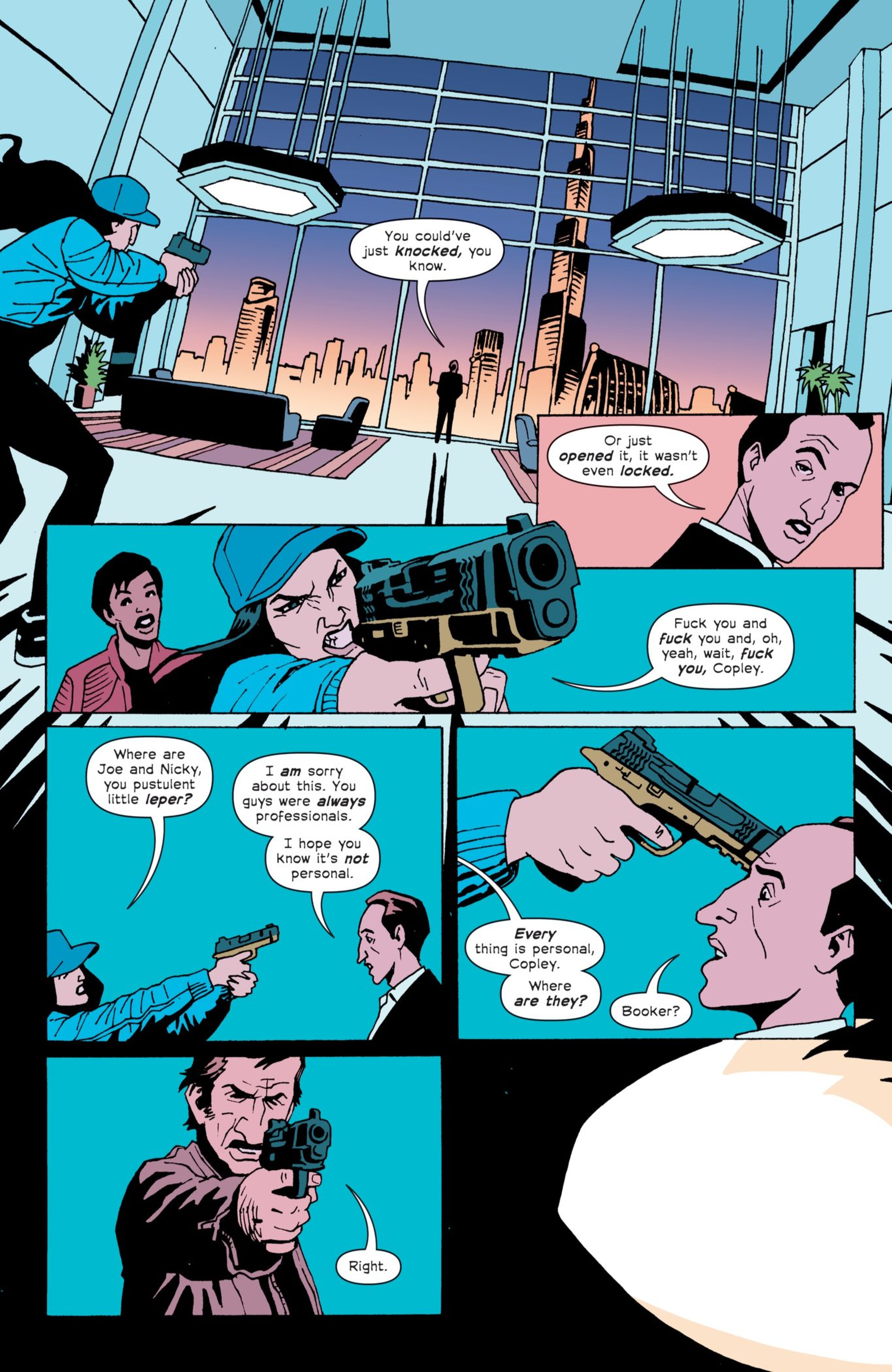

"...don't you have somewhere to *be...?*"
That's the *place...*
...office is on the thirty-fourth *floor.*
Be a pain in the *ass* to find *weapons* quick.
So how we gonna *do* this? We gonna *arm* up and go in *hard* or...?
You guys have a *safe house* or whatever near here?
TAXI
Used to. Place got *found out* when Dubai started its *big* building boom.
Haven't established a *new* one yet.
So I say *again,* how we gonna do this?
Follow my *lead.*

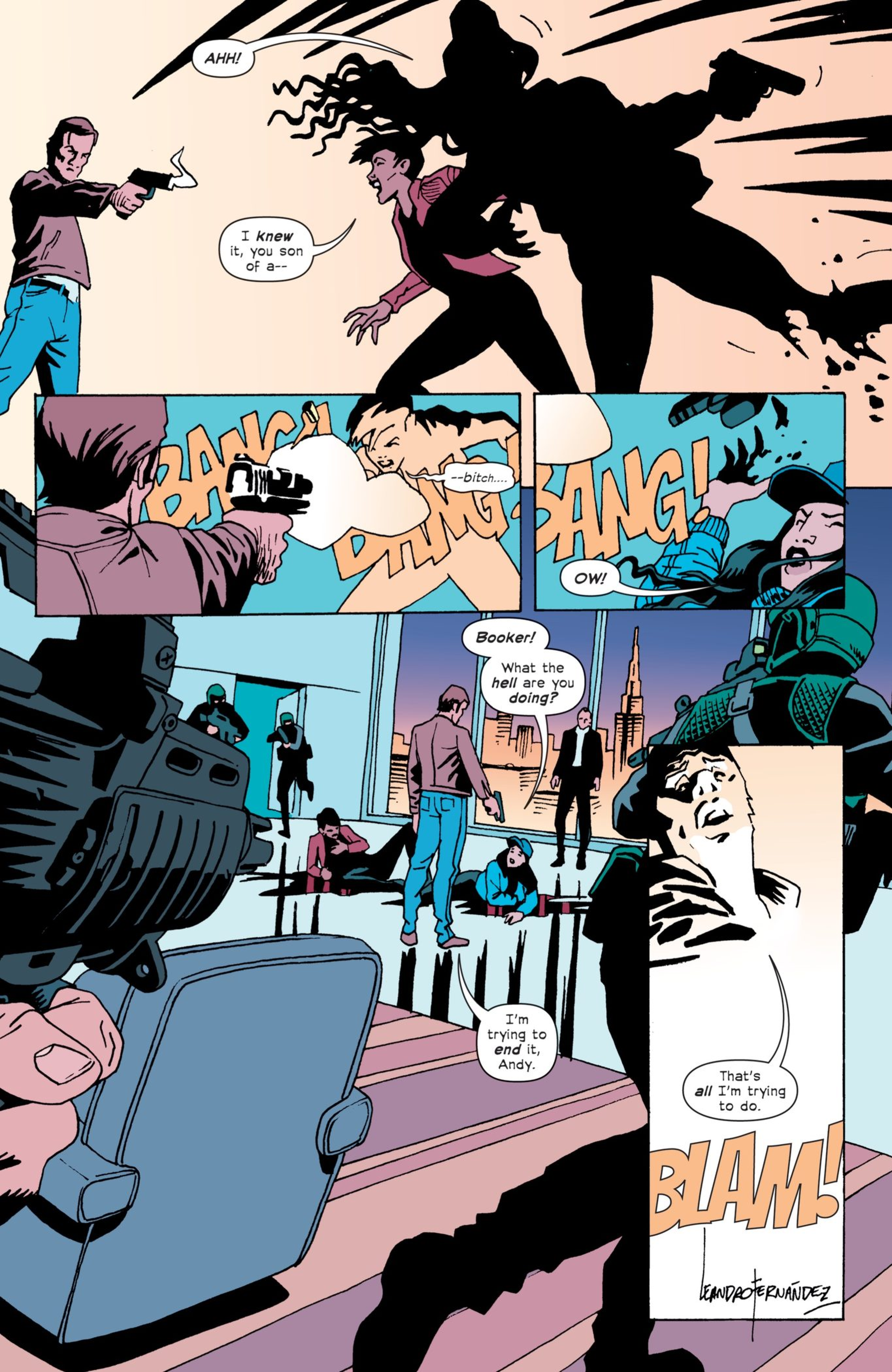

You're *sure* this is the *place?*
According to the *website.*
Good thing you've got that *laptop.*
Nile, I'm the *only* one of us who even *knows* how to use the damn thing.
Andy gets *confused* trying to turn on her *phone.*
I heard that...
May I *help* you?
Oh, I *hope* so.
ANDY--
--what the *hell?!*


Not *wasting* time, here, Nile.
Can one of you do something about the *security* in here? Like turn it *off?*
Yeah, I'm *on* it.
Used to work building security before the Corps.
Before the Corps? How many jobs have you *had?*
I've lost *count.* Worked as a security guard, web designer, social media consultant, reporter, waited tables...
...I mean, you gotta make a *living,* right?
How *old* are you, Nile?
Twenty-seven.
You been *busy.*
Every *day* you waste is one you don't get *back,* right?
There...
...that's done it, whole *building's* in *test* mode, now.
We could *blow* the thing up, cops would only respond because of the *noise...*


Hey.
'Sup?
I gotta ask you a question.
About Booker.
What about him?
Andy, just cuz you've got a *computer* doesn't mean you're on the internet. It doesn't *work* like that.
Booker's connecting to the *web* in a damn *cave,* that's--
ding
Ride's here.

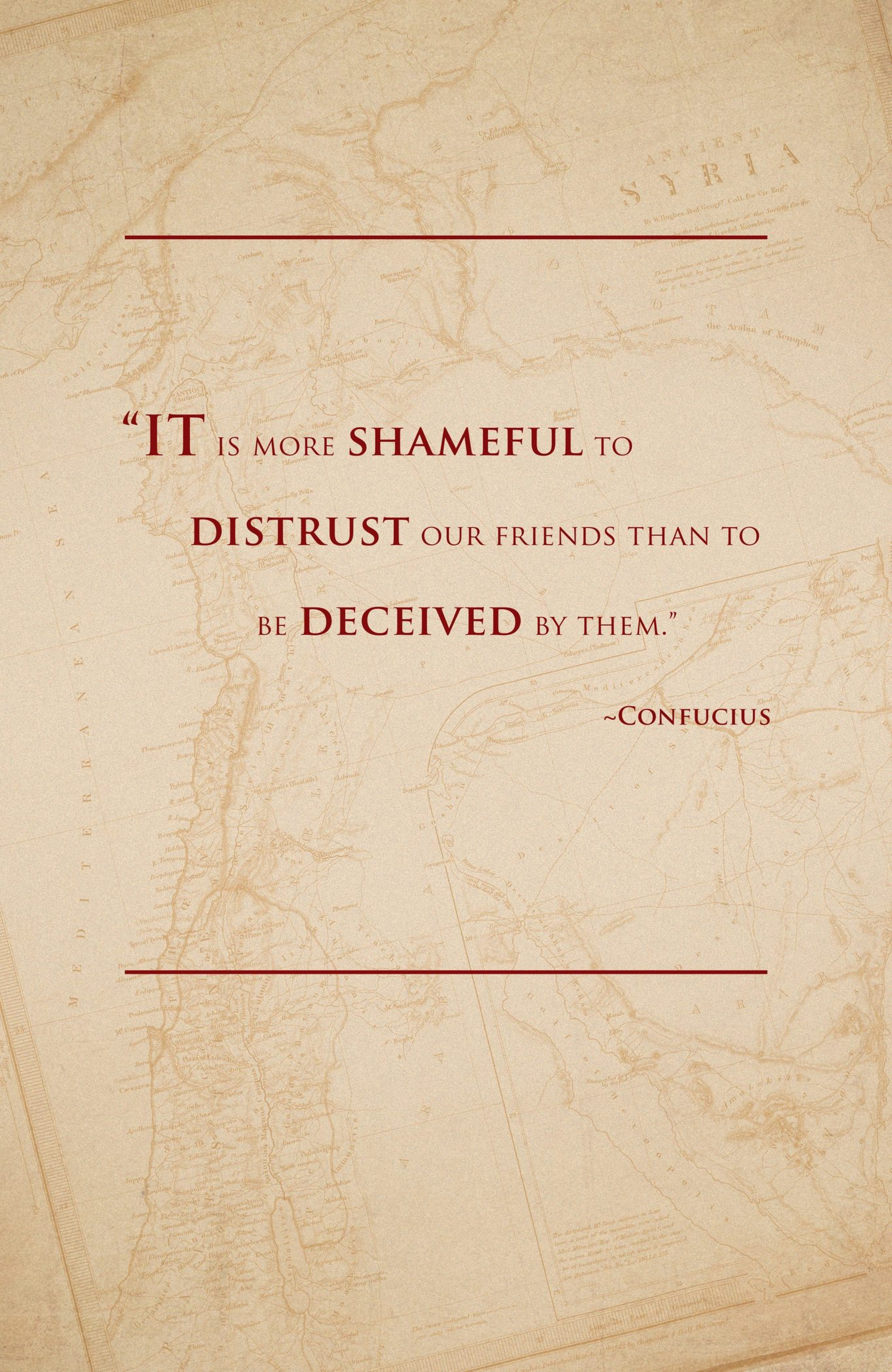

ding
On me.
Tight.
VERITAS
security &
assessment
curity &
ass
es
"Veritas."
My sweet *ass* it is.


You could've just knocked, you know.
Or just opened it, it wasn't even locked.
Fuck you and fuck you and, oh, yeah, wait, fuck you, Copley.
Where are Joe and Nicky, you pustulent little leper?
I am sorry about this. You guys were always professionals.
I hope you know it's not personal.
Every thing is personal, Copley.
Where are they?
Booker?
Right.


AHH!
I knew it, you son of a--
BANG!
BANG!
--bitch....
BANG!
OW!
Booker! What the hell are you doing?
I'm trying to end it, Andy.
That's all I'm trying to do.
BLAM!
LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ

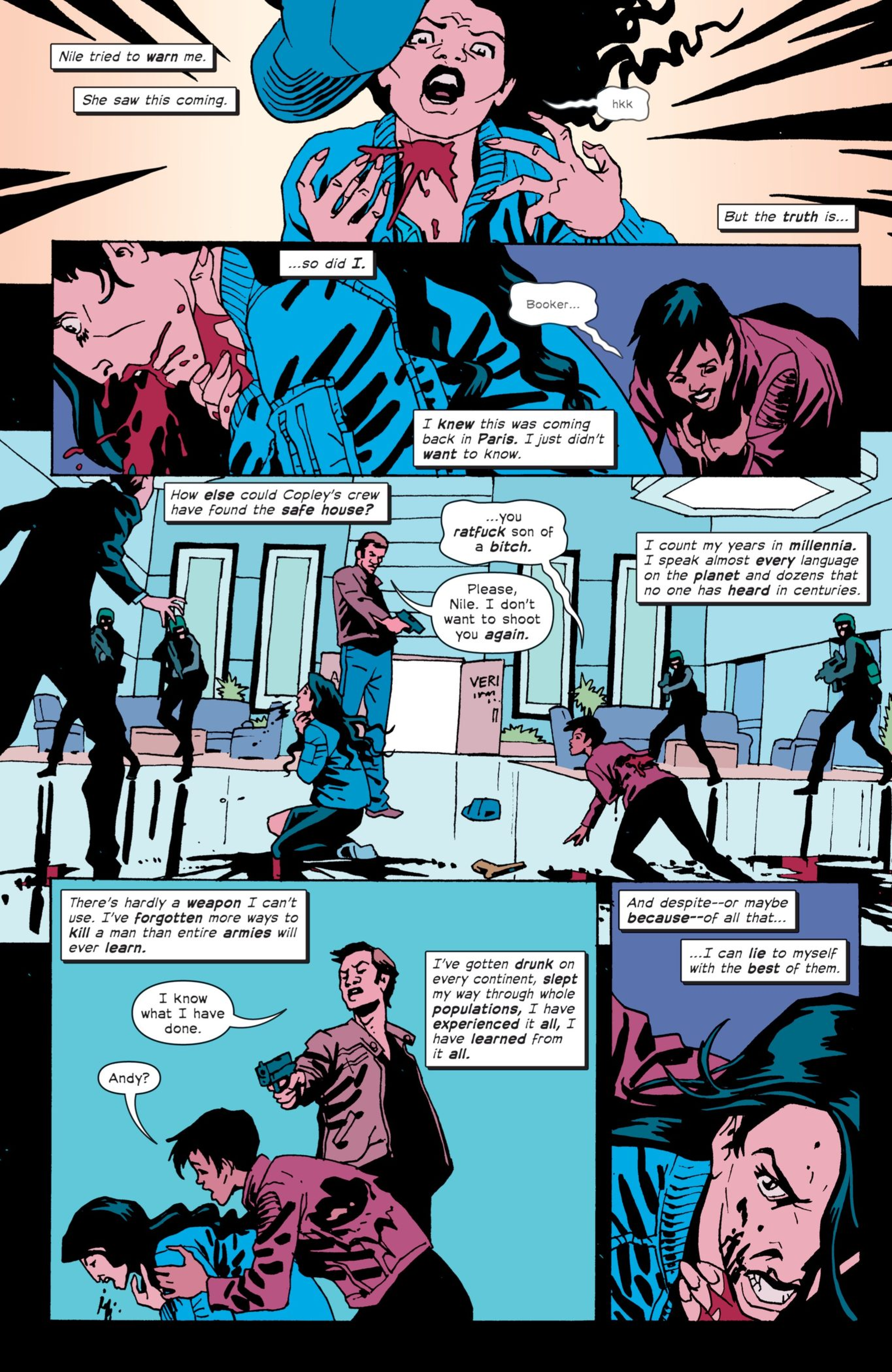
Leandro Fernández
Daniela Miwa

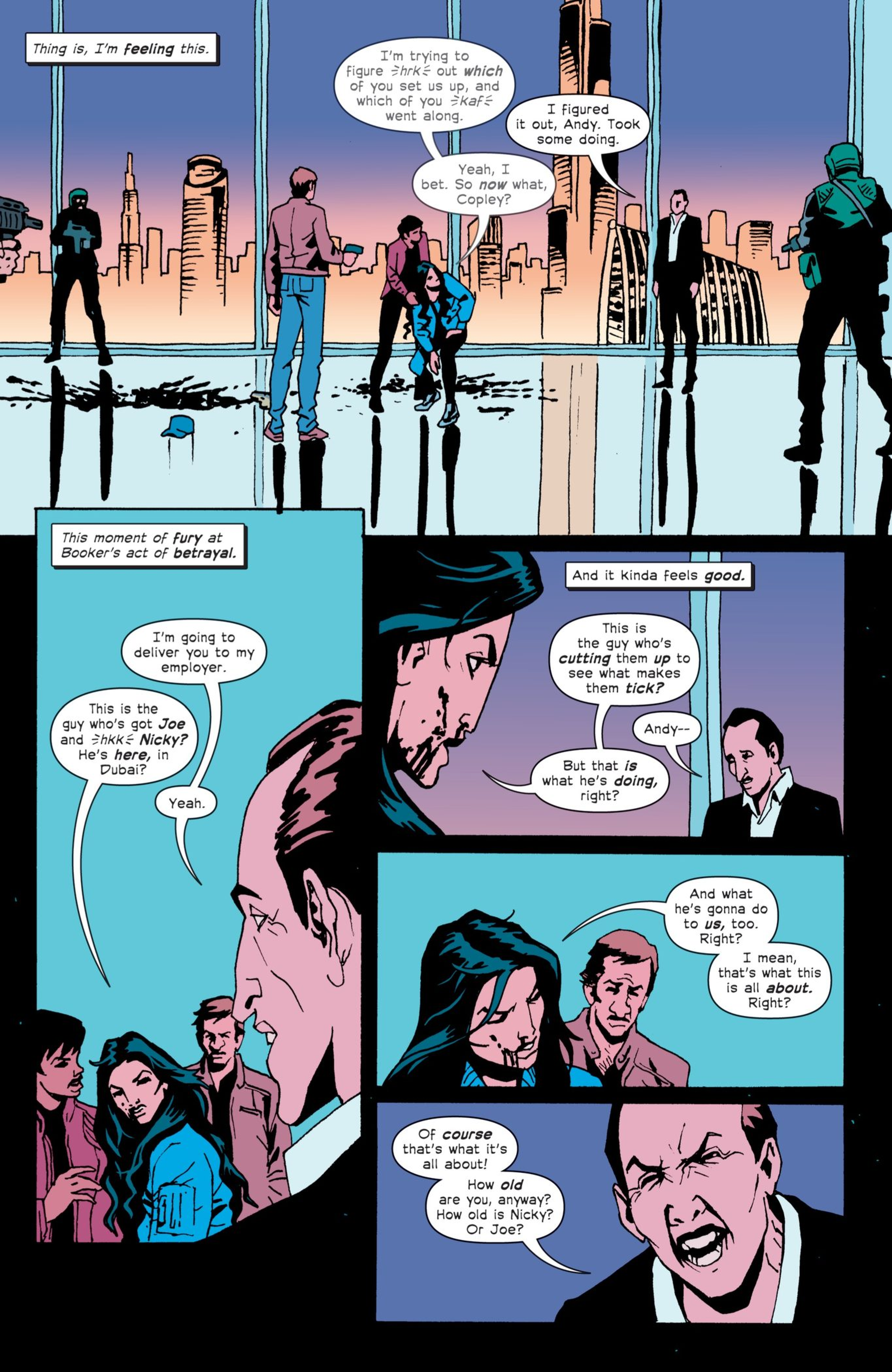
CHAPTER FIVE

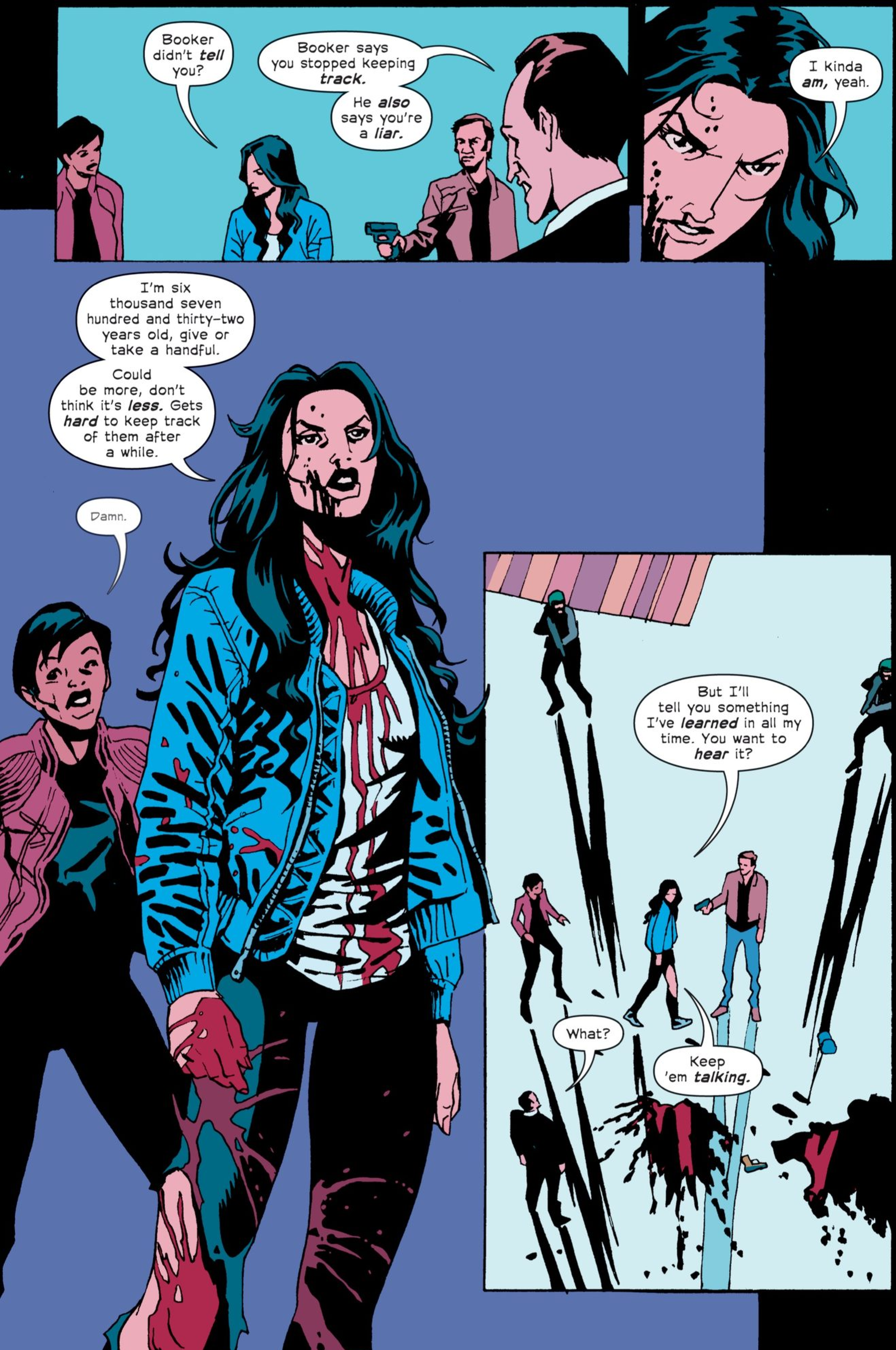

ANCIENT
SYRIA

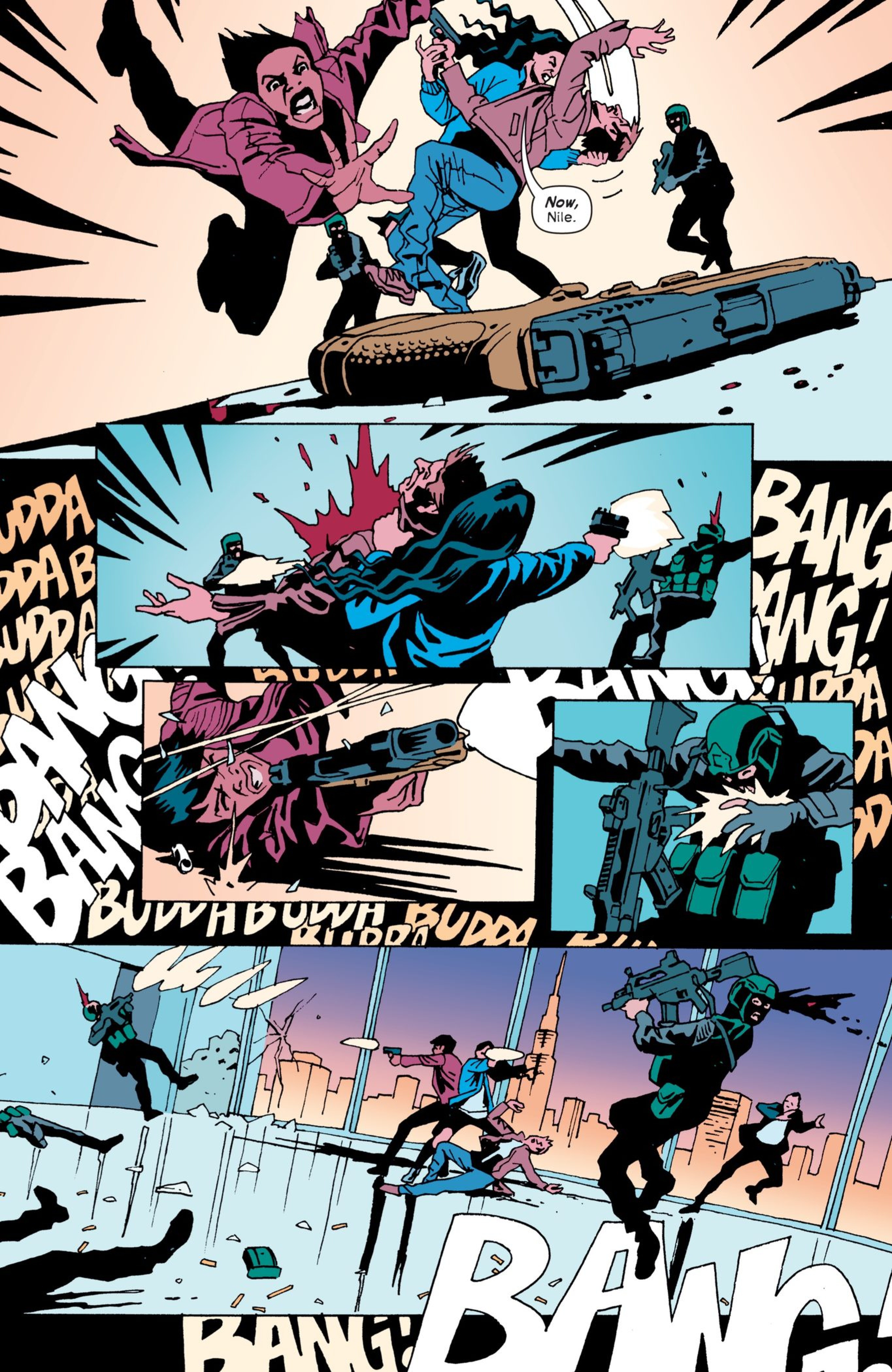
“**IT** is more **SHAMEFUL** to **DISTRUST** our friends than to be **DECEIVED** by them.”

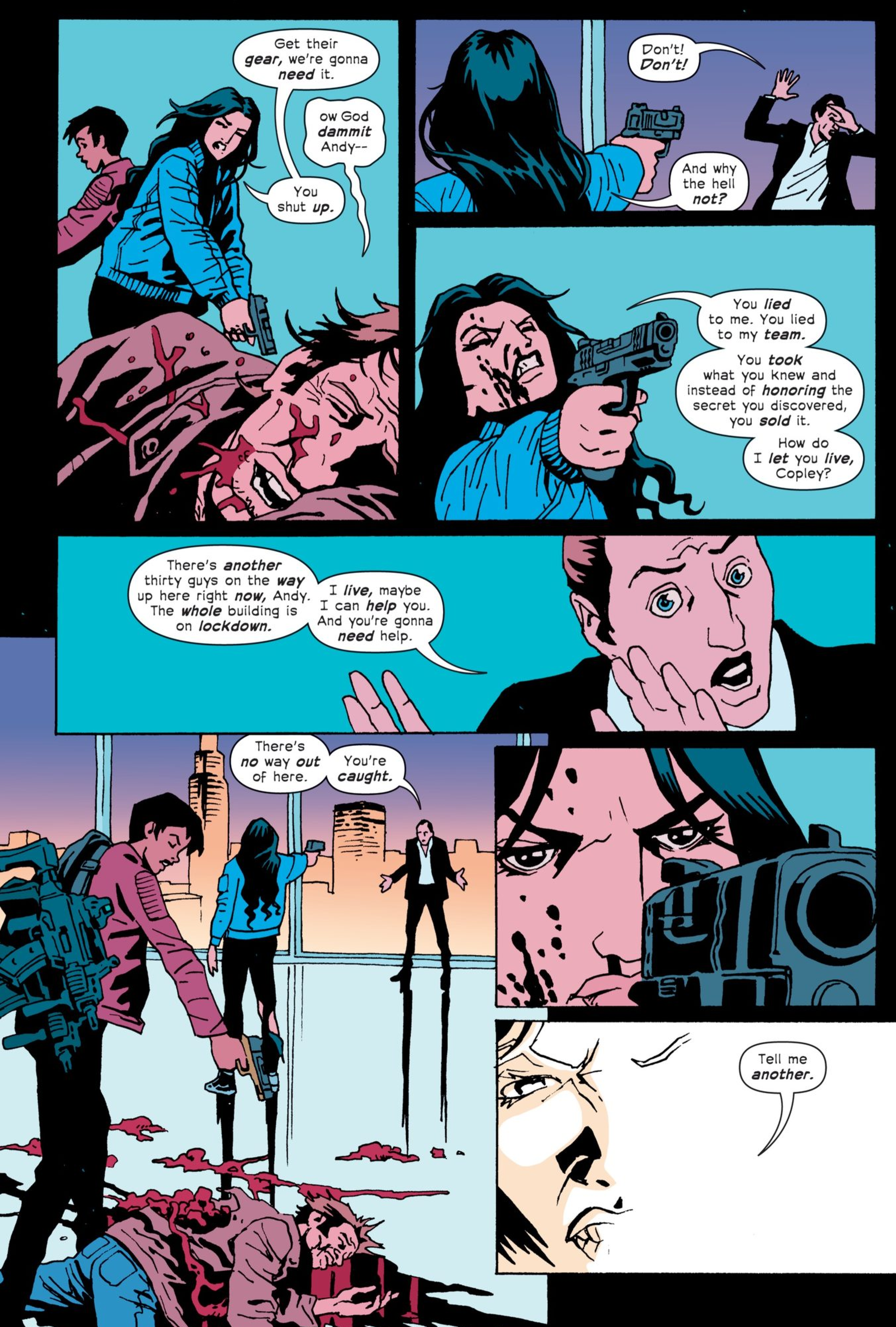
~Confucius

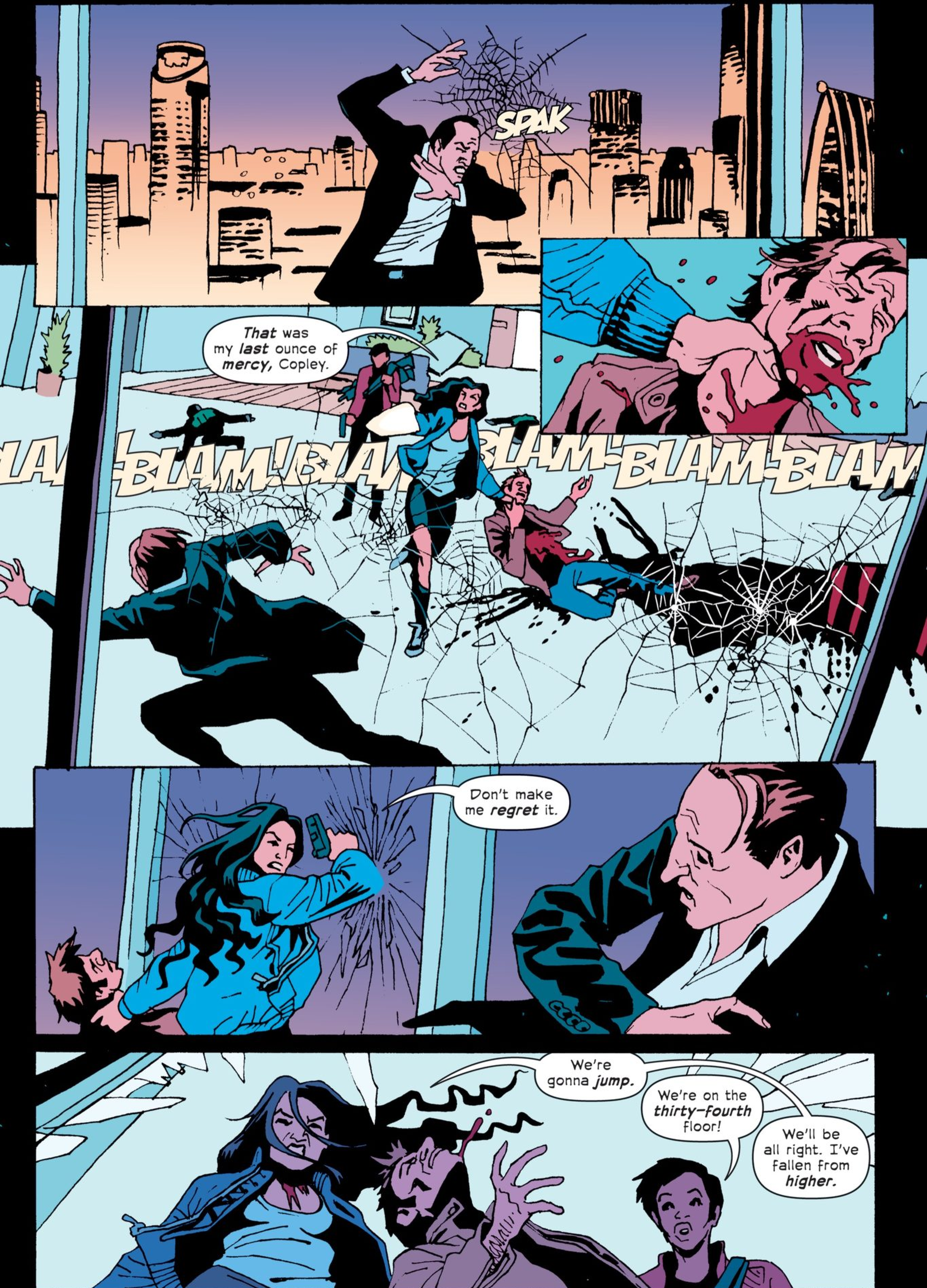

Nile tried to **warn** me.
She saw this coming.
hkk
But the **truth** is...
...so did **I.**
Booker...
I **knew** this was coming back in **Paris.** I just didn't **want** to know.
How **else** could Copley's crew have found the **safe house?**
...you **ratfuck** son of a **bitch.**
Please, Nile. I don't want to shoot you **again.**
I count my years in **millennia.** I speak almost **every** language on the **planet** and dozens that no one has **heard** in centuries.
VERI
There's hardly a **weapon** I can't use. I've **forgotten** more ways to **kill** a man than entire **armies** will ever **learn.**
I know what I have done.
Andy?
I've gotten **drunk** on every continent, **slept** my way through whole **populations,** I have **experienced** it **all,** I have **learned** from it **all.**
And despite--or maybe **because--**of all that...
...I can **lie** to myself with the **best** of them.

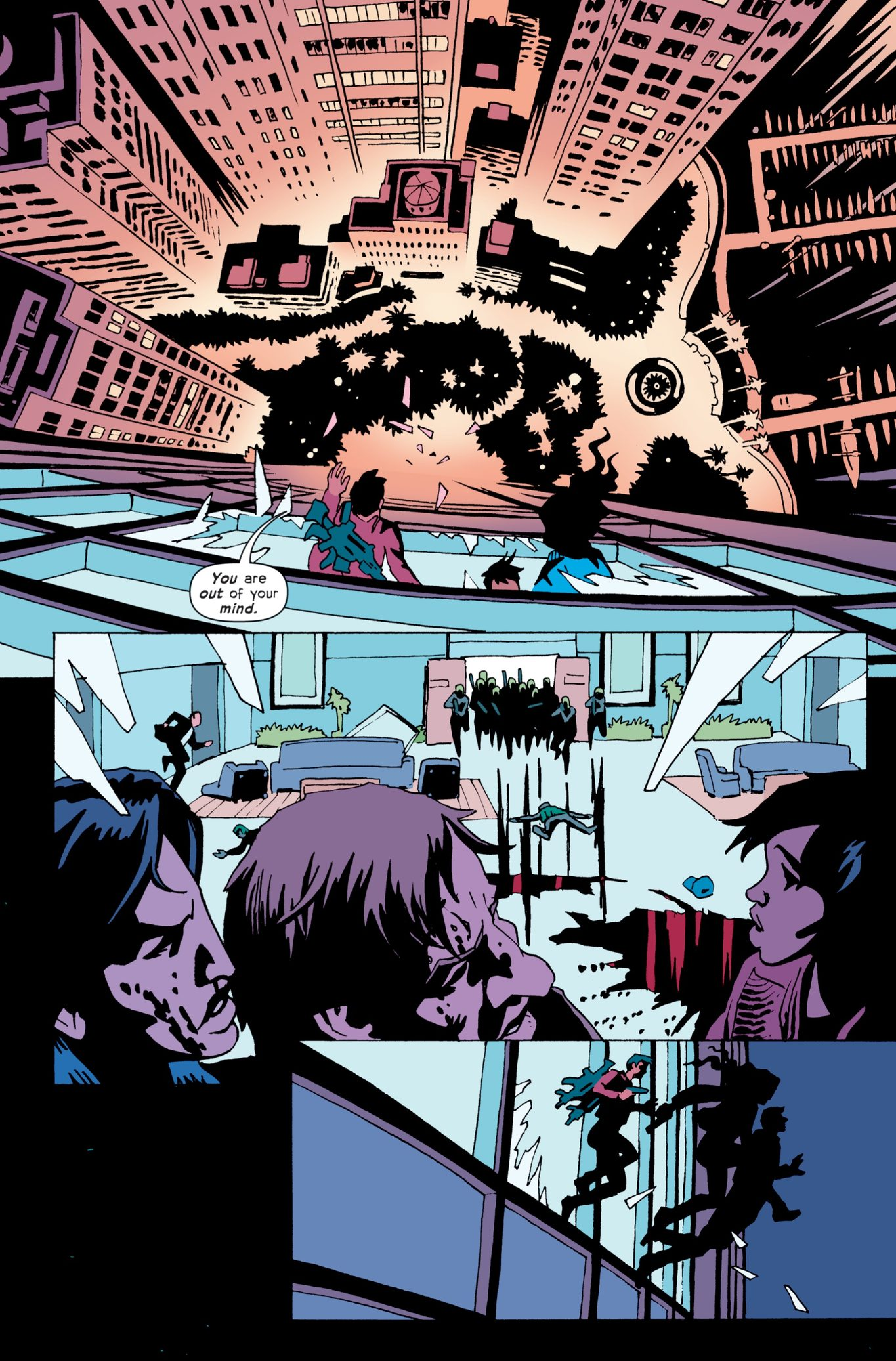

Thing is, I'm **feeling** this.
I'm trying to figure ⇒hrk⇐ out **which** of you set us up, and which of you ⇒kaf⇐ went along.
I figured it out, Andy. Took some doing.
Yeah, I bet. So **now** what, Copley?
This moment of **fury** at Booker's act of **betrayal.**
I'm going to deliver you to my employer.
This is the guy who's got **Joe** and ⇒hkk⇐ **Nicky?** He's **here,** in Dubai?
Yeah.
And it kinda feels **good.**
This is the guy who's **cutting** them **up** to see what makes them **tick?**
Andy--
But that **is** what he's **doing,** right?
And what he's gonna do to **us,** too. Right?
I mean, that's what this is all **about.** Right?
Of **course** that's what it's all about!
How **old** are you, anyway? How old is Nicky? Or Joe?

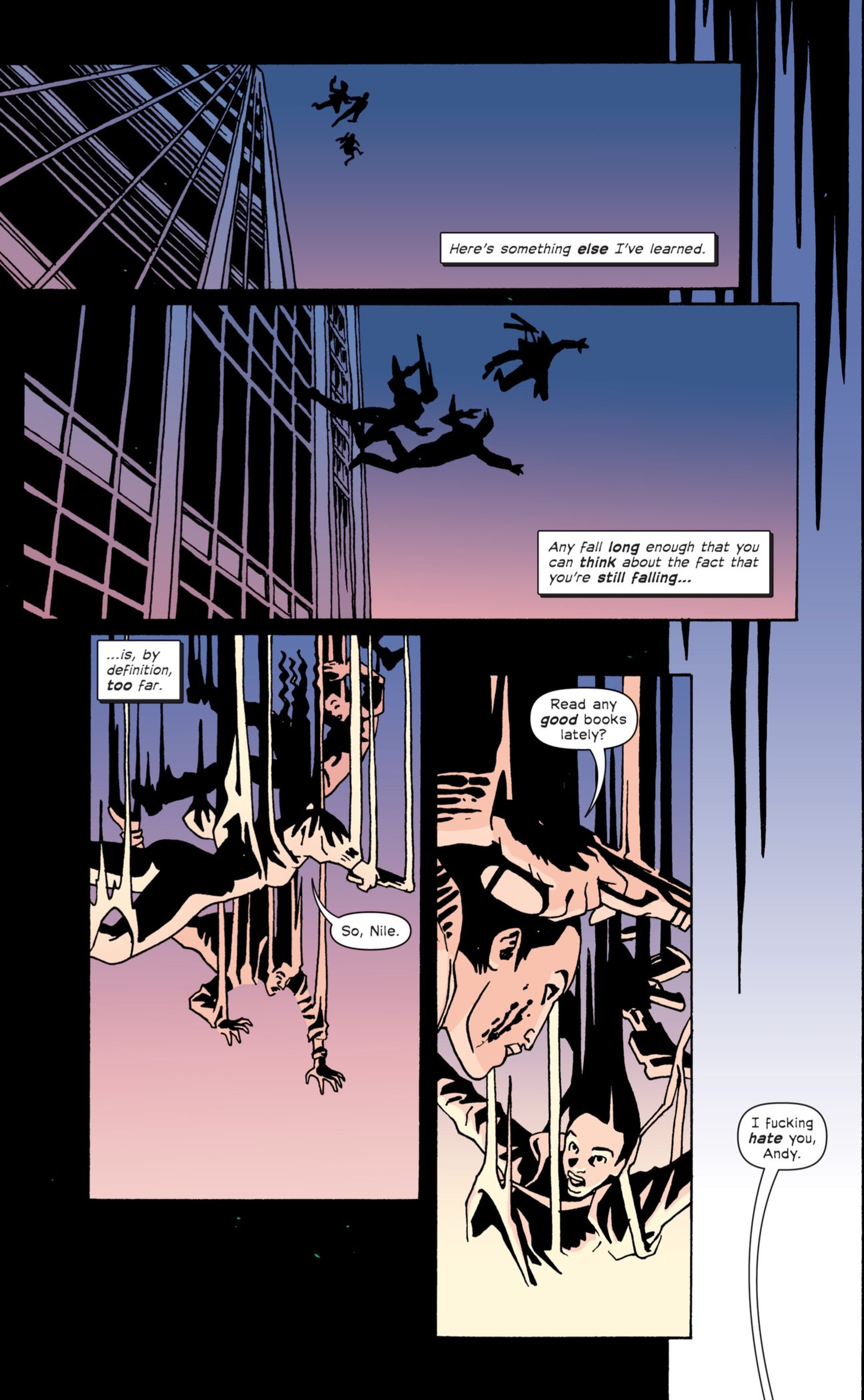

Booker didn't *tell* you?
Booker says you stopped keeping *track.*
He *also* says you're a *liar.*
I kinda *am,* yeah.
I'm six thousand seven hundred and thirty-two years old, give or take a handful.
Could be more, don't think it's *less.* Gets *hard* to keep track of them after a while.
Damn.
But I'll tell you something I've *learned* in all my time. You want to *hear* it?
What?
Keep 'em *talking.*

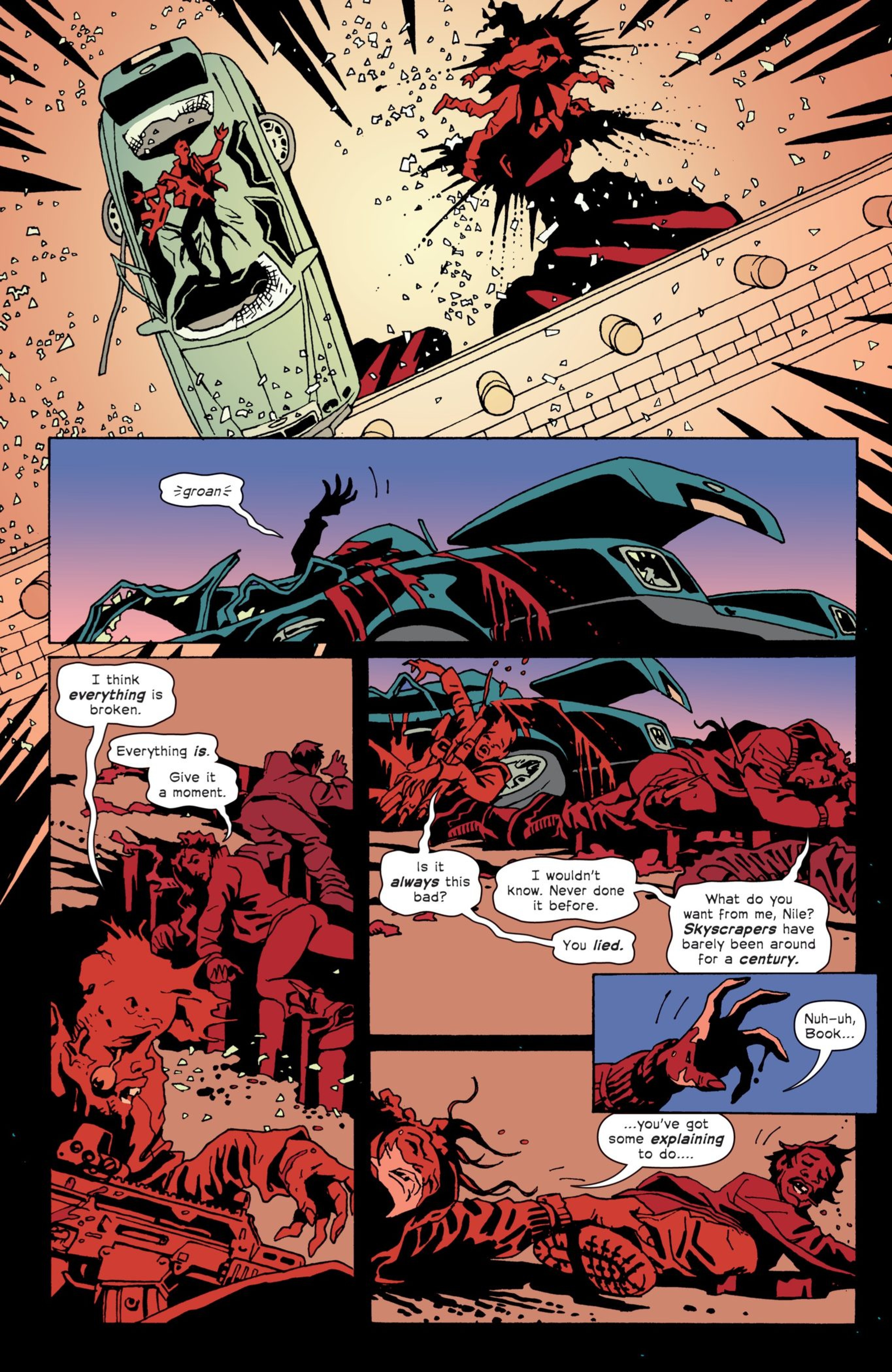

Now, Nile.
BUDDA BUDDA B BUDDA
BANG BANG!
BUDDA BUDDA
BANG BANG
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
BANG! BANG

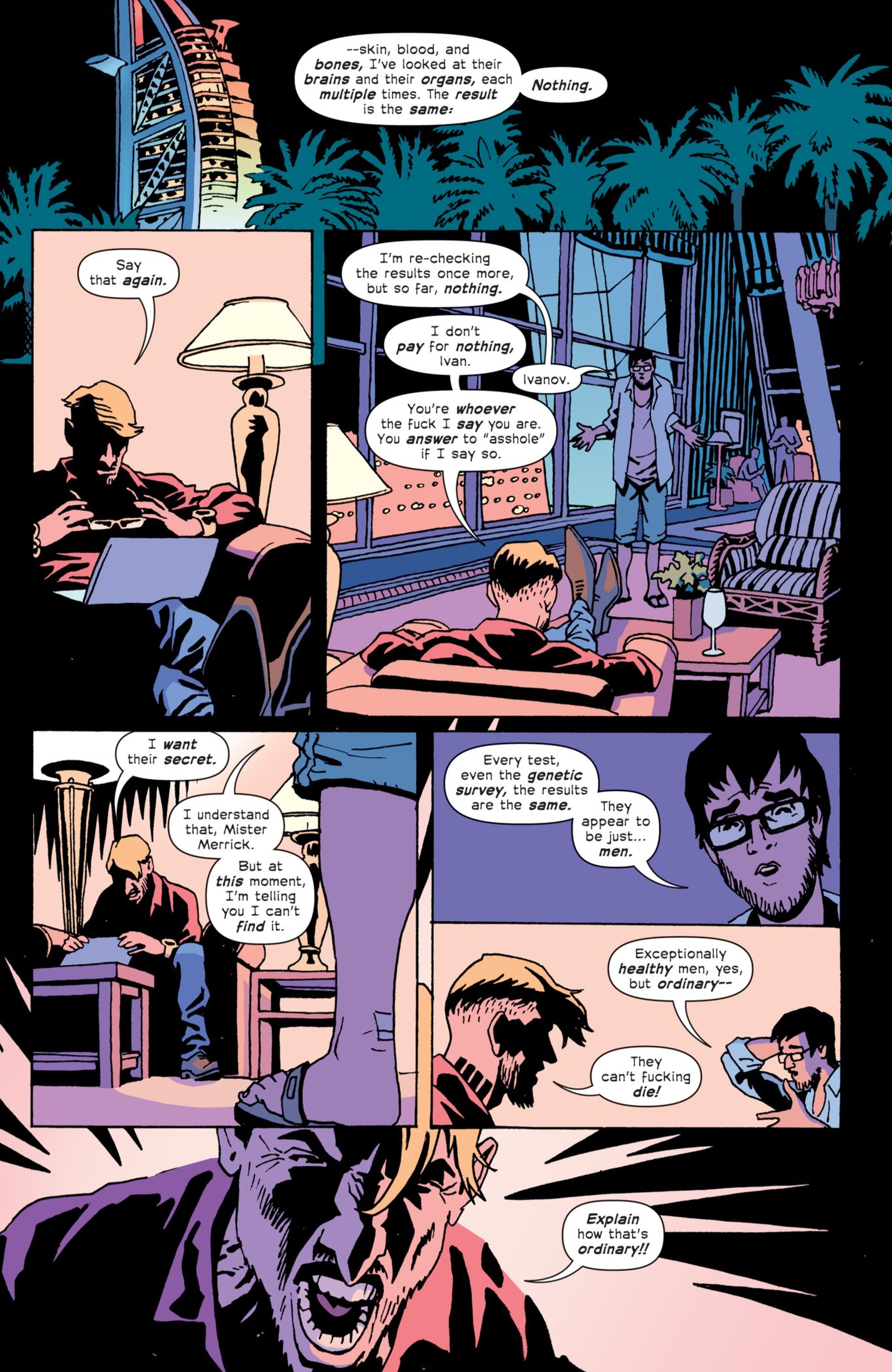

Get their *gear,* we're gonna *need* it.
You shut *up.*
ow God *dammit* Andy--
Don't! *Don't!*
And why the hell *not?*
You *lied* to me. You lied to my *team.*
You *took* what you knew and instead of *honoring* the secret you discovered, you *sold* it.
How do I *let* you *live,* Copley?
There's *another* thirty guys on the *way* up here right *now,* Andy. The *whole* building is on *lockdown.*
I *live,* maybe I can *help* you. And you're gonna *need* help.
There's *no* way *out* of here.
You're *caught.*
Tell me *another.*

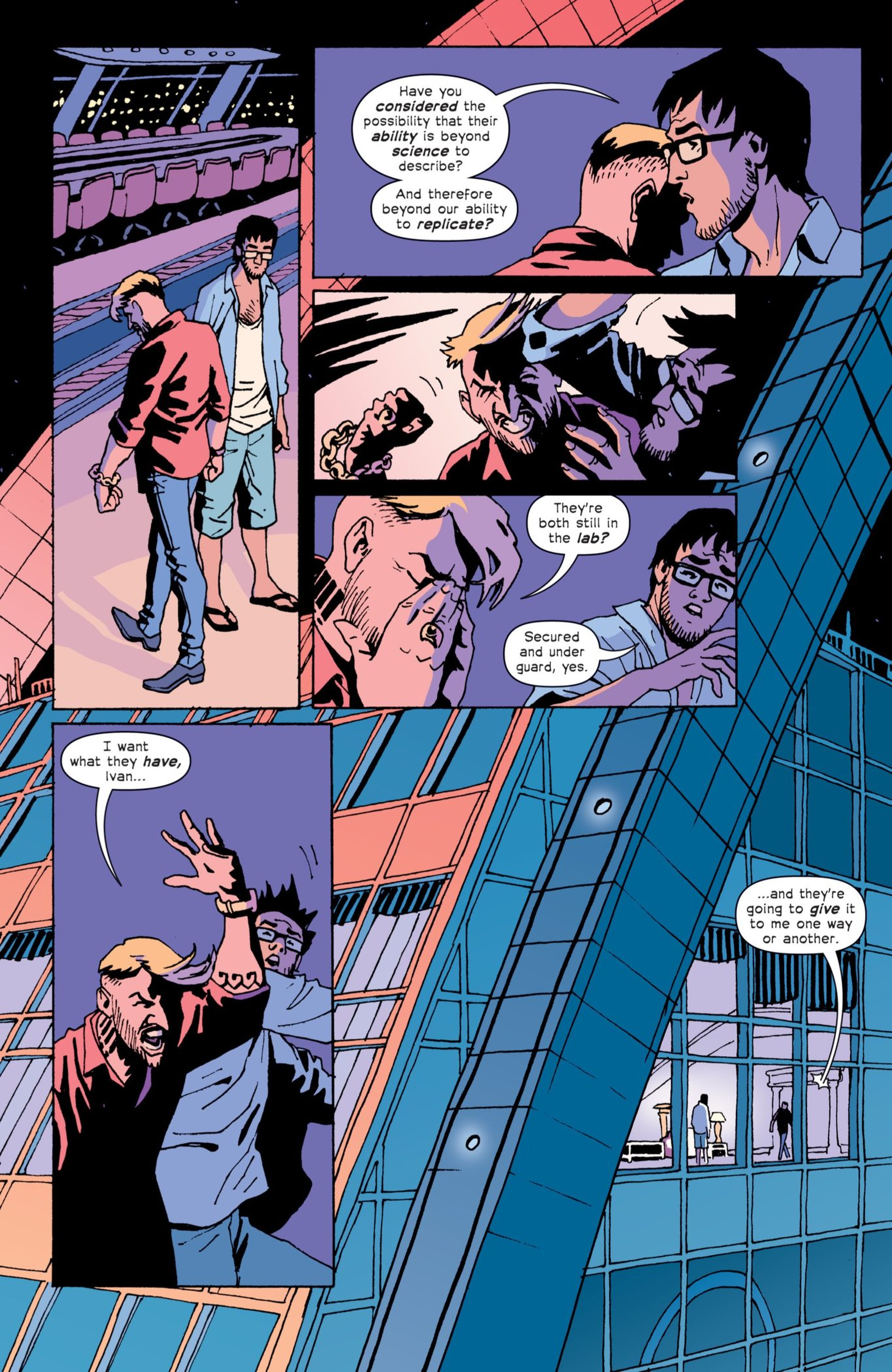

SPAK
That was my last ounce of mercy, Copley.
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
Don't make me regret it.
We're gonna jump.
We're on the thirty-fourth floor!
We'll be all right. I've fallen from higher.

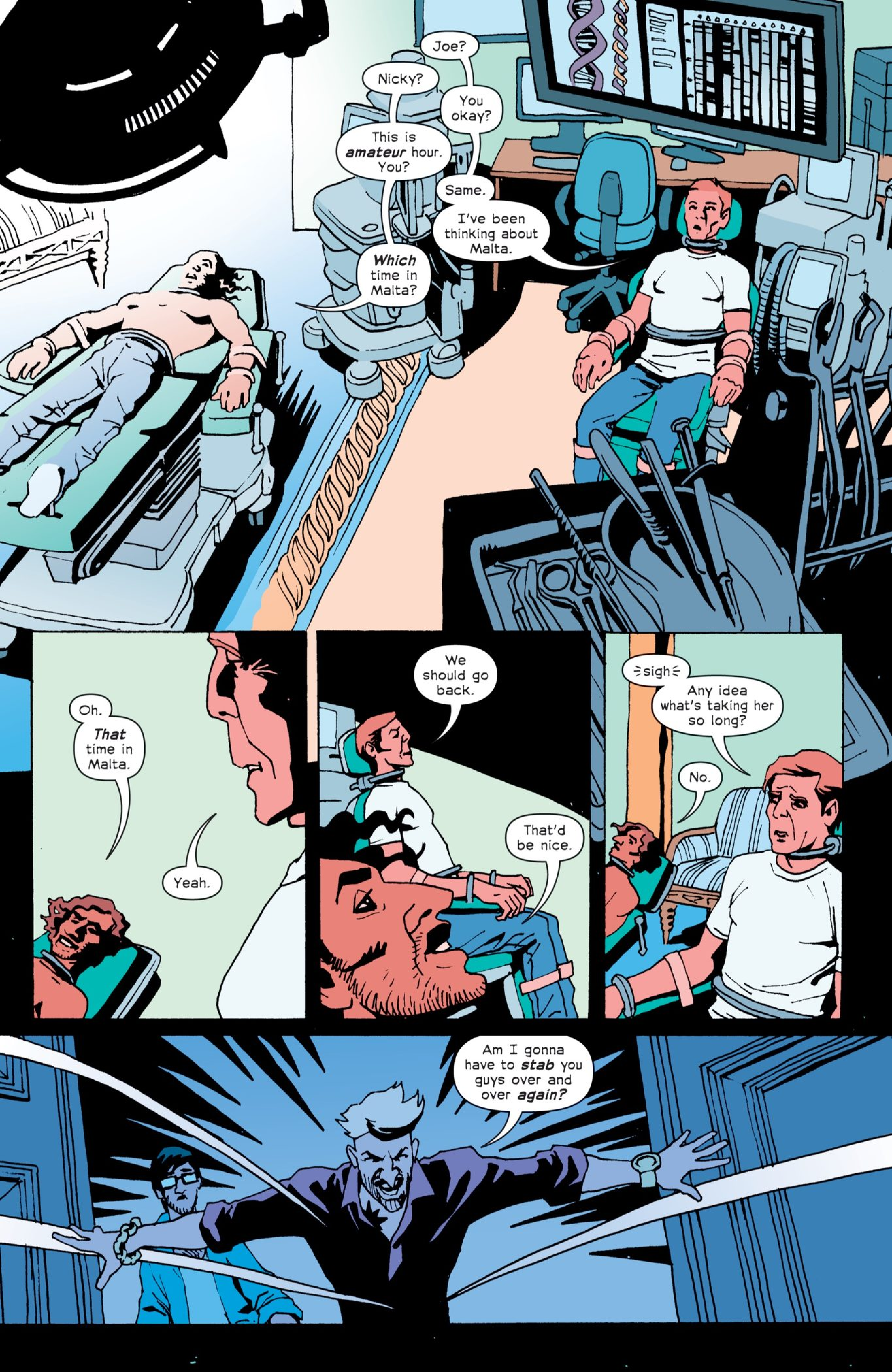

You are out of your mind.

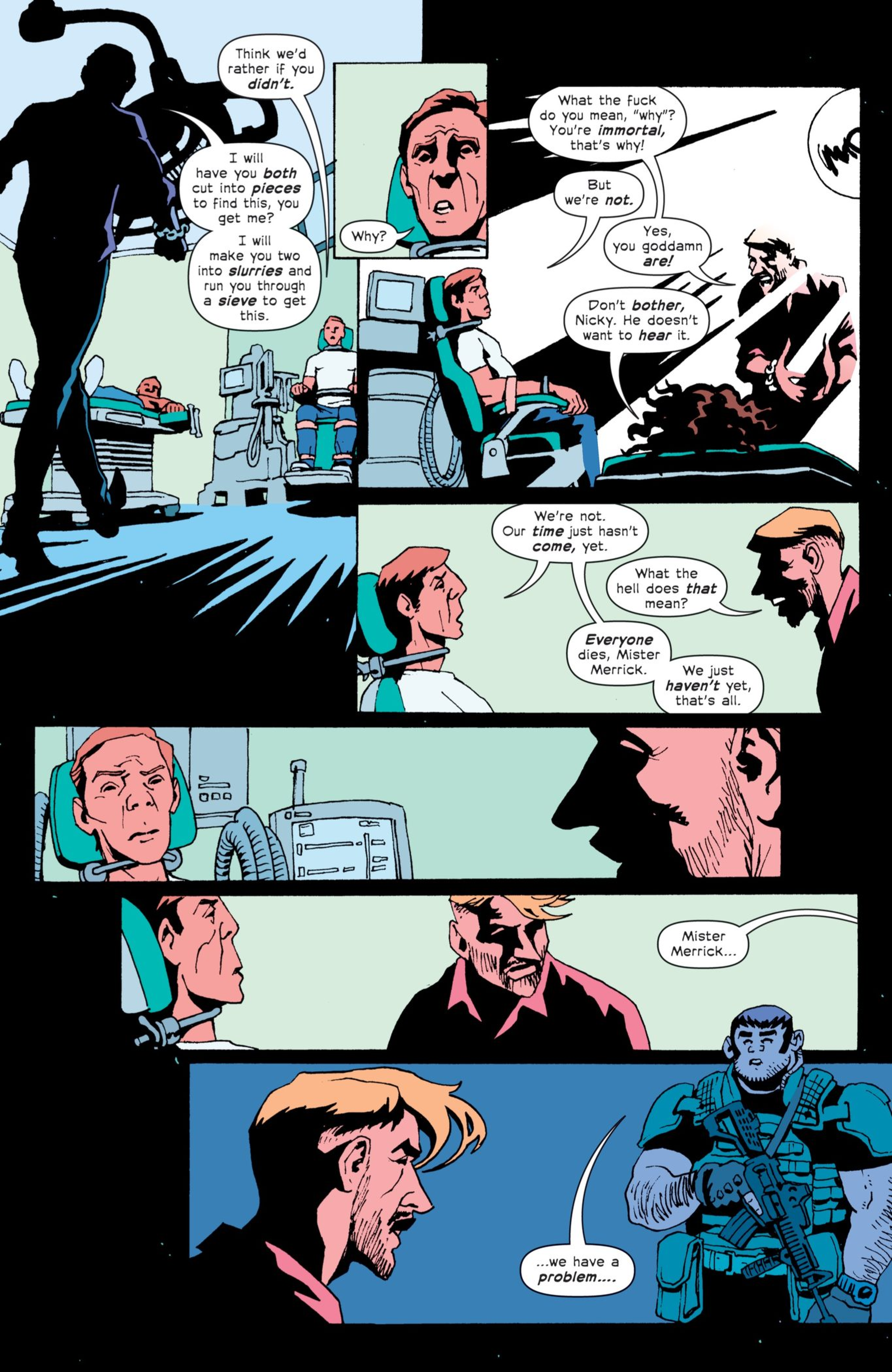

Here's something *else* I've learned.
Any fall **long** enough that you can **think** about the fact that you're **still falling...**
...is, by definition, ***too*** far.
So, Nile.
Read any ***good*** books lately?
I fucking ***hate*** you, Andy.

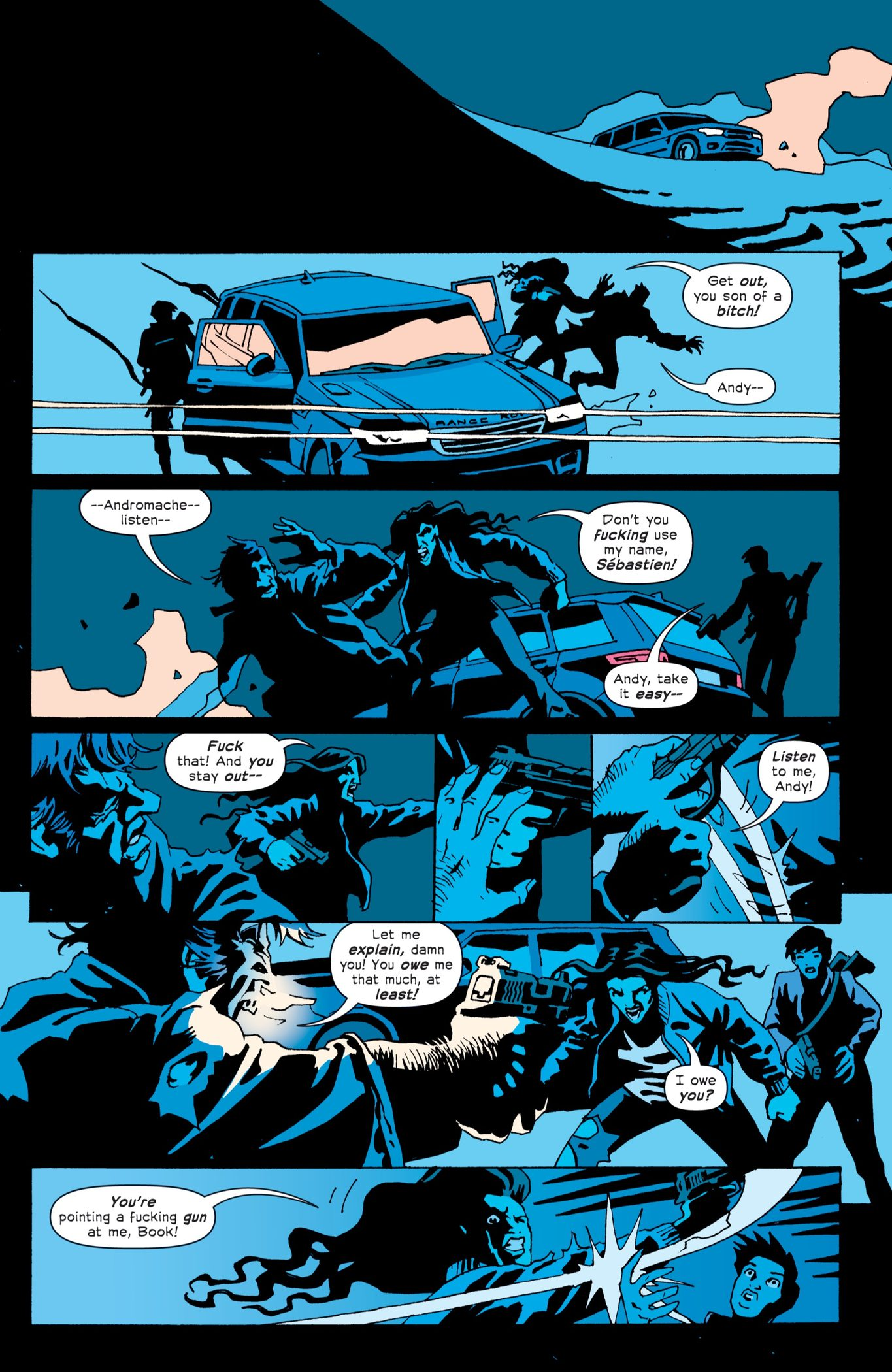

groan
I think *everything* is broken.
Everything *is*.
Give it a moment.
Is it *always* this bad?
I wouldn't know. Never done it before.
You *lied.*
What do you want from me, Nile? *Skyscrapers* have barely been around for a *century.*
Nuh-uh, Book...
...you've got some *explaining* to do....

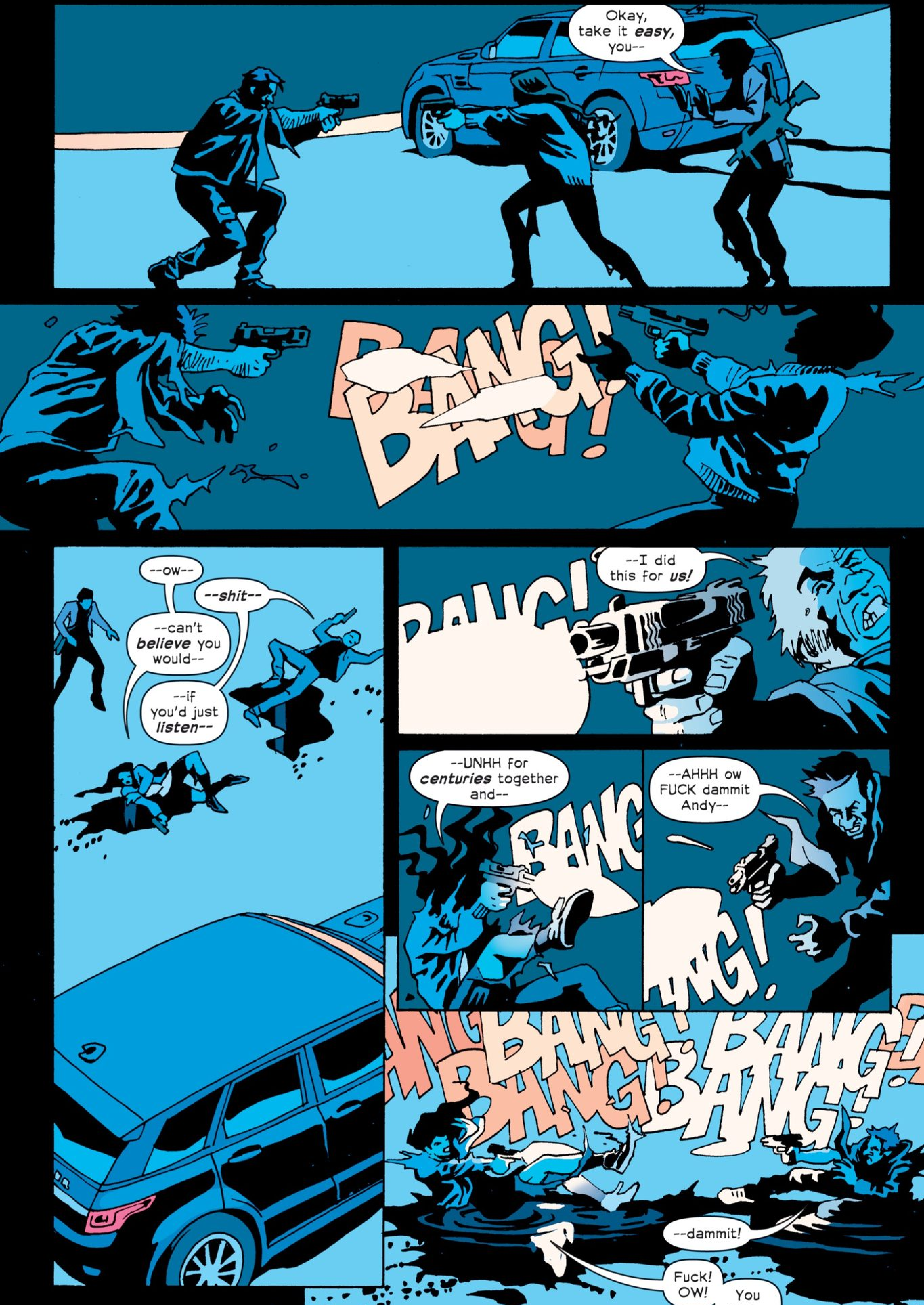

--skin, blood, and bones, I've looked at their brains and their organs, each multiple times. The result is the same:
Nothing.
Say that again.
I'm re-checking the results once more, but so far, nothing.
I don't pay for nothing, Ivan.
Ivanov.
You're whoever the fuck I say you are. You answer to "asshole" if I say so.
I want their secret.
I understand that, Mister Merrick.
But at this moment, I'm telling you I can't find it.
Every test, even the genetic survey, the results are the same.
They appear to be just... men.
Exceptionally healthy men, yes, but ordinary--
They can't fucking die!
Explain how that's ordinary!!

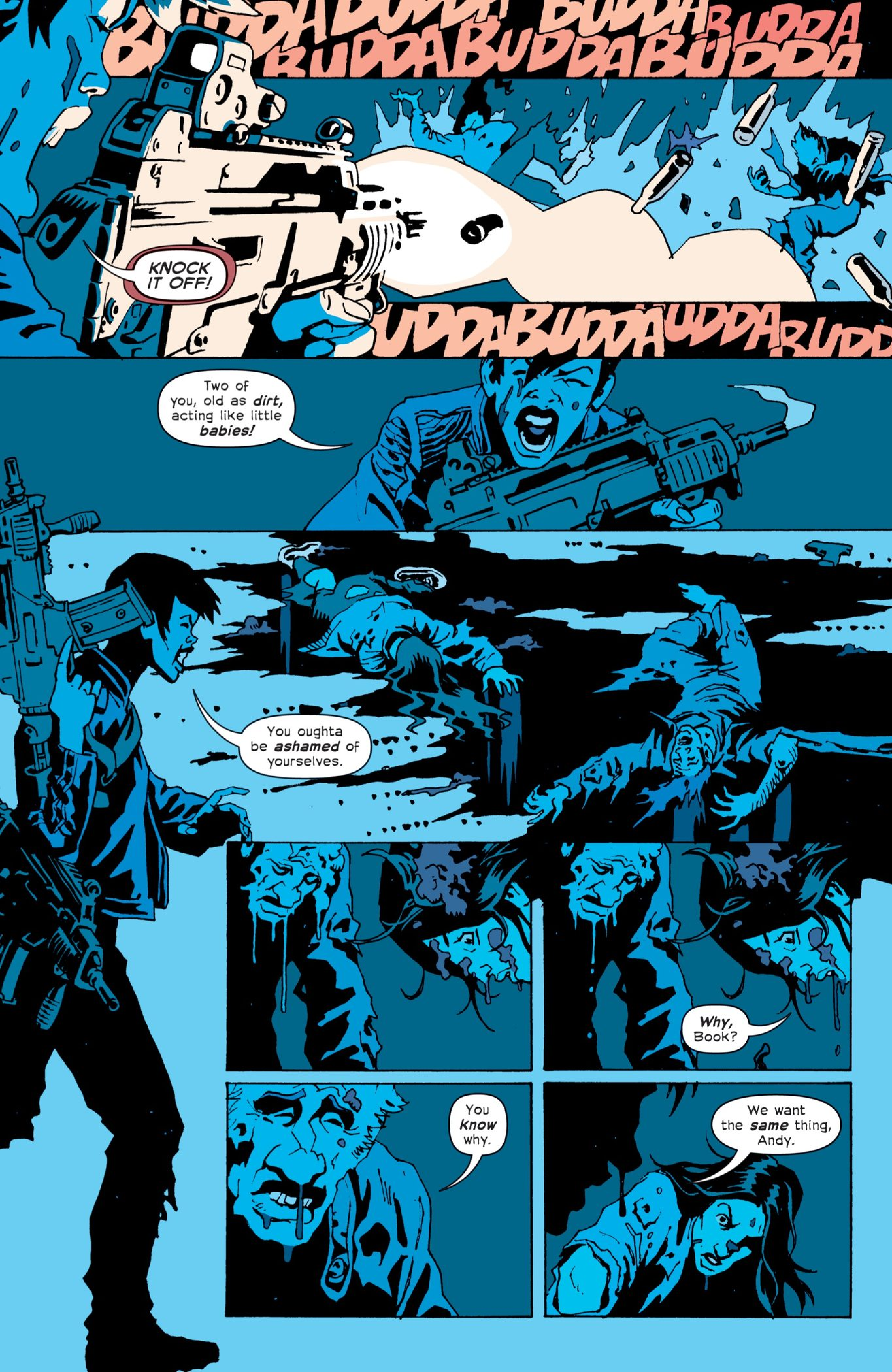

Have you *considered* the possibility that their *ability* is beyond *science* to describe?
And therefore beyond our ability to *replicate?*
They're both still in the *lab?*
Secured and under guard, yes.
I want what they *have,* Ivan...
...and they're going to *give* it to me one way or another.

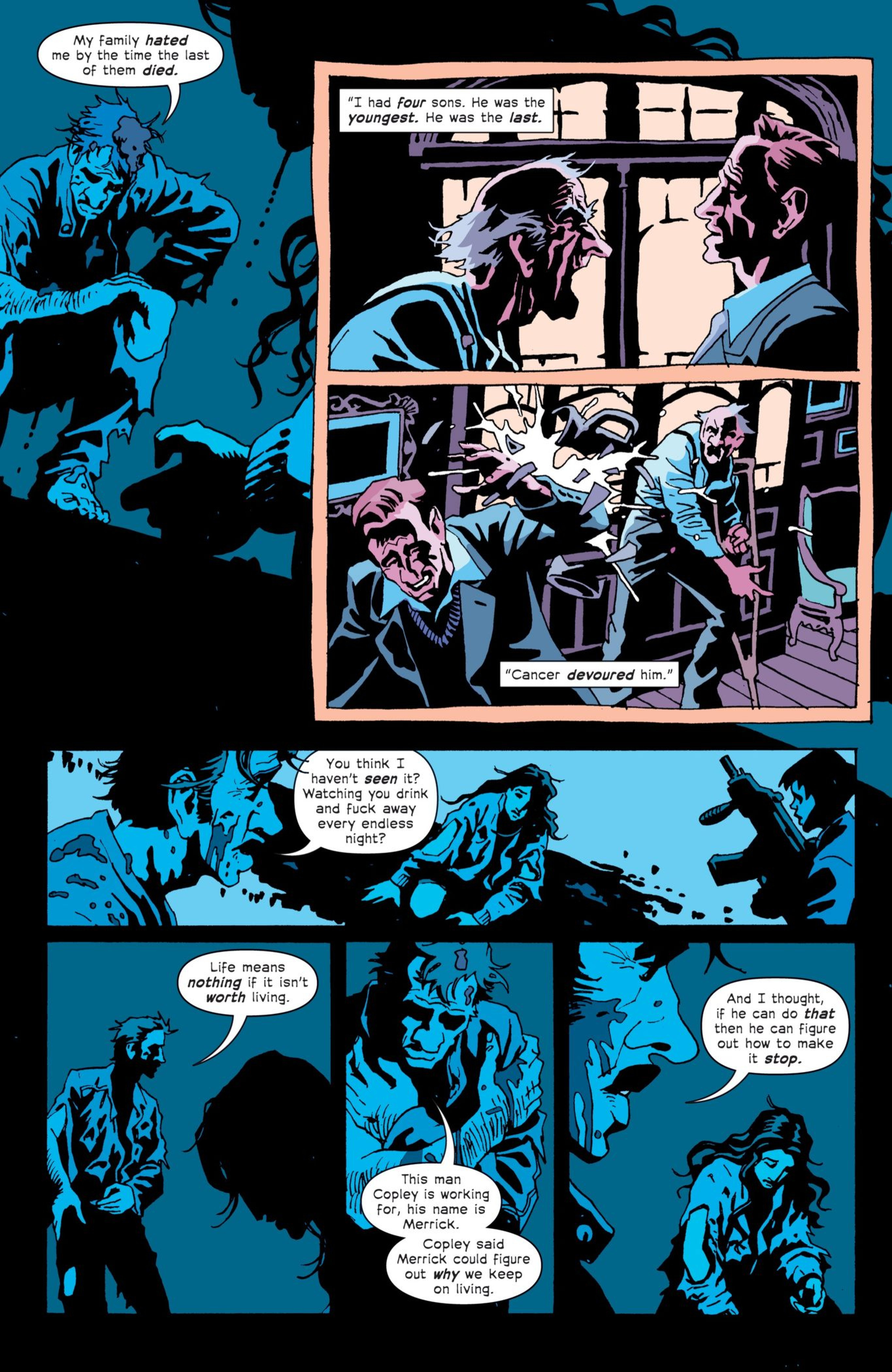

Joe?
Nicky?
You okay?
This is *amateur* hour. You?
Same.
I've been thinking about Malta.
Which time in Malta?
Oh. *That* time in Malta.
Yeah.
We should go back.
That'd be nice.
sigh
Any idea what's taking her so long?
No.
Am I gonna have to *stab* you guys over and over *again?*

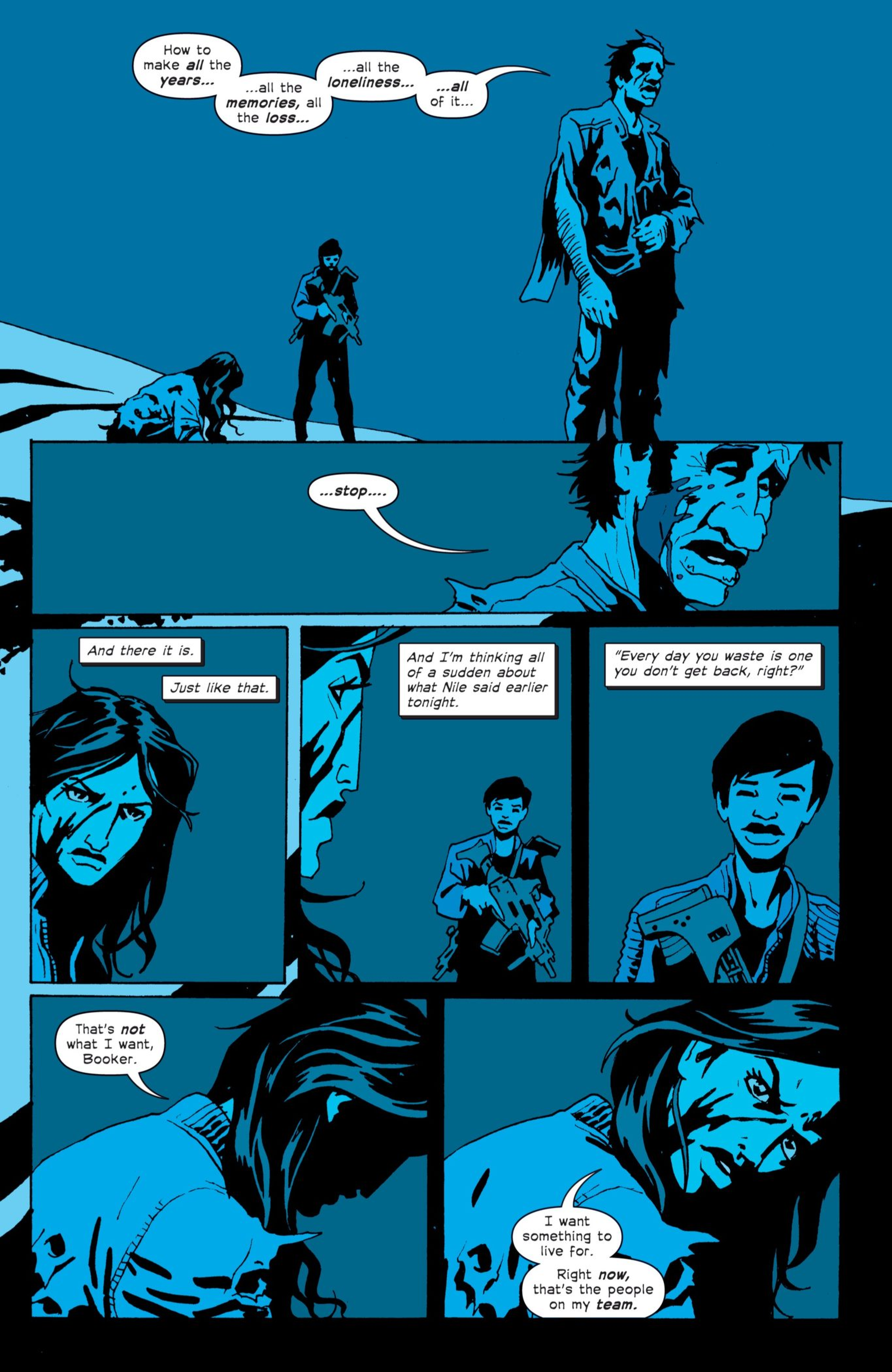

Think we'd rather if you *didn't.*
I will have you *both* cut into *pieces* to find this, you get me?
I will make you two into *slurries* and run you through a *sieve* to get this.
Why?
What the fuck do you mean, "why"? You're *immortal,* that's why!
But we're *not.*
Yes, you goddamn *are!*
Don't *bother,* Nicky. He doesn't want to *hear* it.
We're not. Our *time* just hasn't *come,* yet.
What the hell does *that* mean?
Everyone dies, Mister Merrick.
We just *haven't* yet, that's all.
Mister Merrick...
...we have a *problem....*

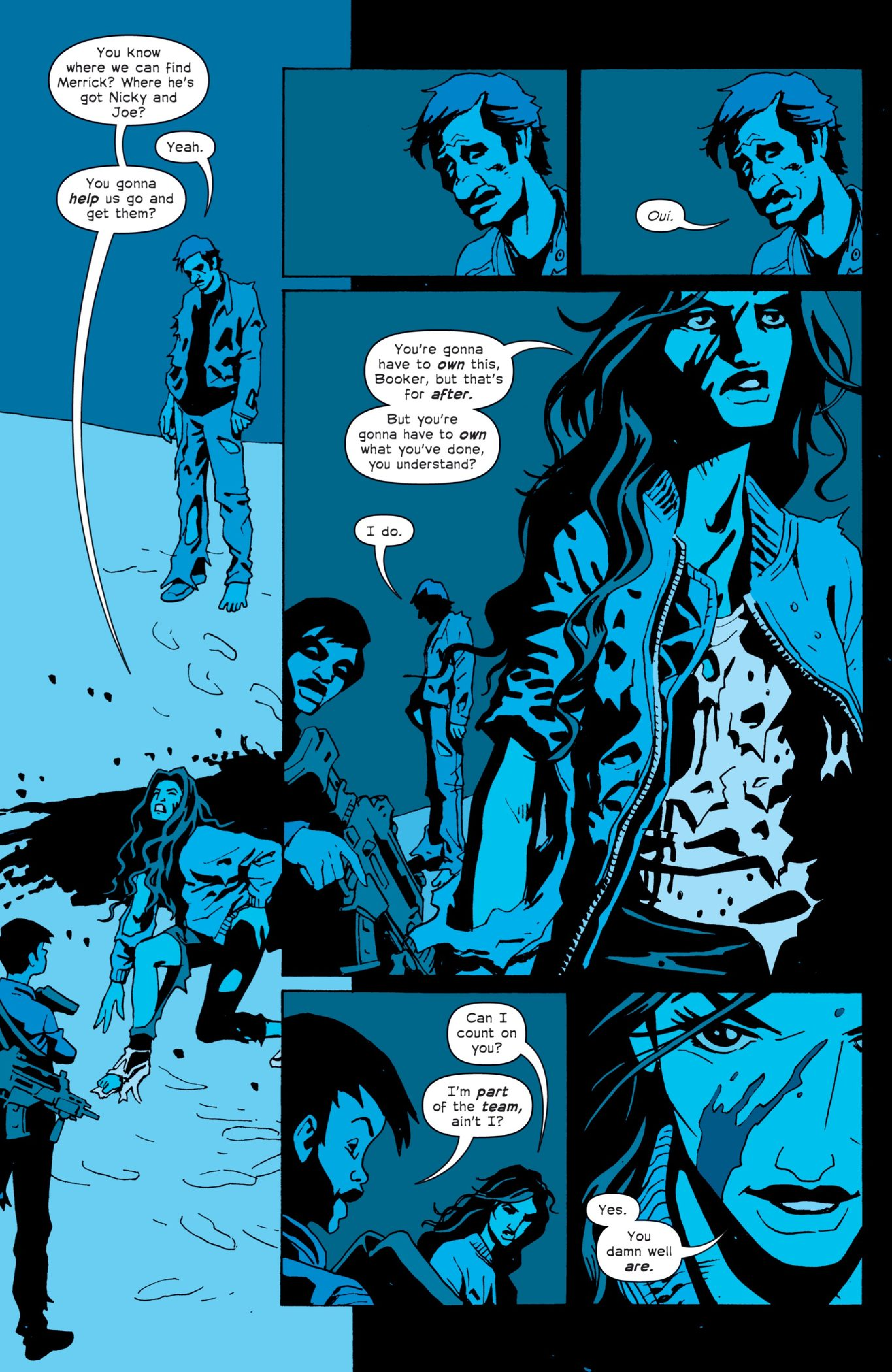

Get *out,* you son of a *bitch!*
RANGE
Andy--
--Andromache-- listen--
Don't you *fucking* use my name, *Sébastien!*
Andy, take it *easy*--
Fuck that! And *you* stay *out*--
Listen to me, Andy!
Let me *explain,* damn you! You *owe* me that much, at *least!*
I owe *you?*
You're pointing a fucking *gun* at me, Book!

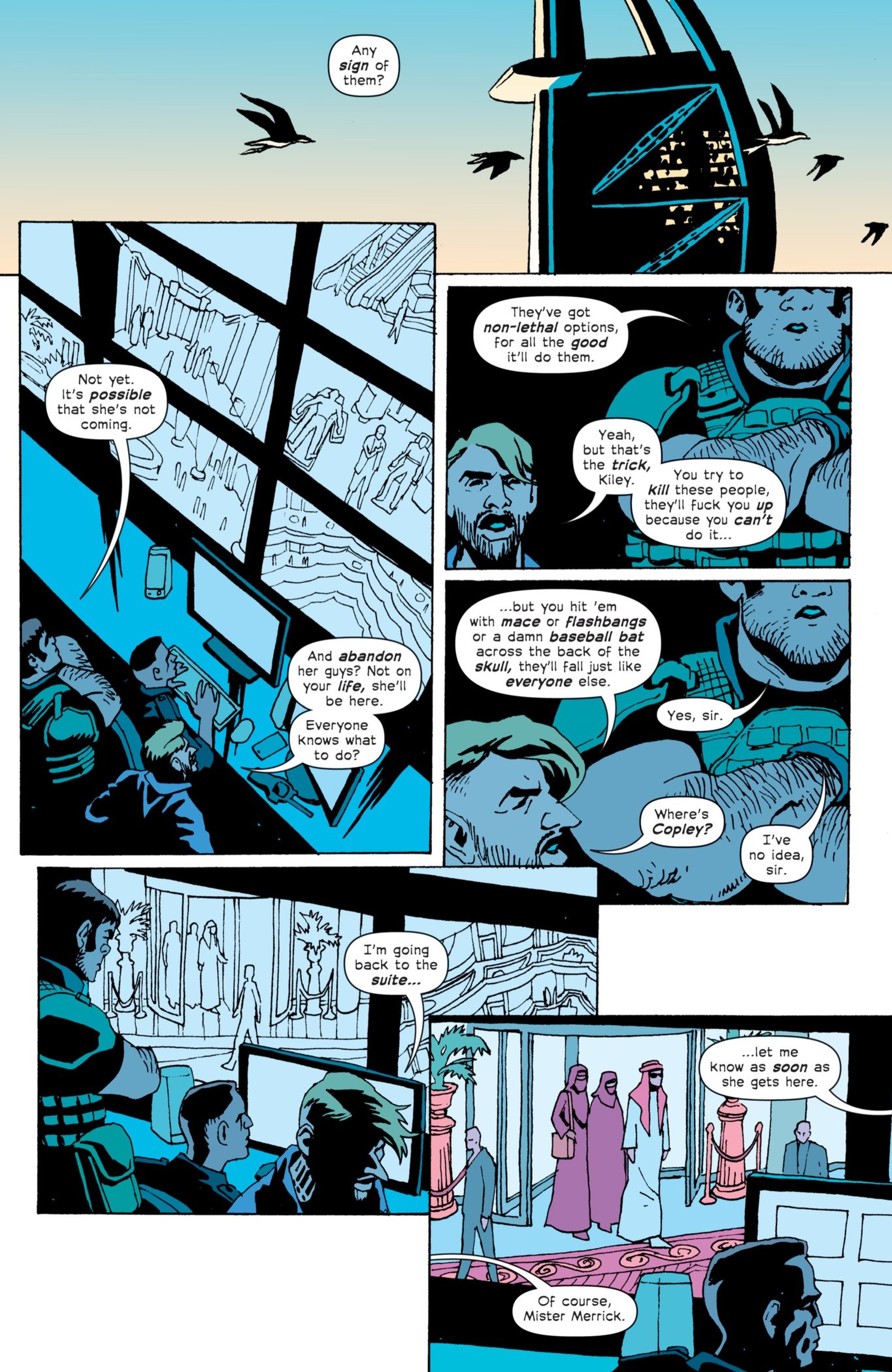

Okay, take it *easy,* you--
BANG!
BANG!
--ow--
--shit--
--can't *believe* you would--
--if you'd just *listen--*
BANG!
--I did this for *us!*
--UNHH for *centuries* together and--
BANG
--AHHH ow FUCK dammit Andy--
BANG!
BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!
--dammit!
Fuck! OW!
You little--

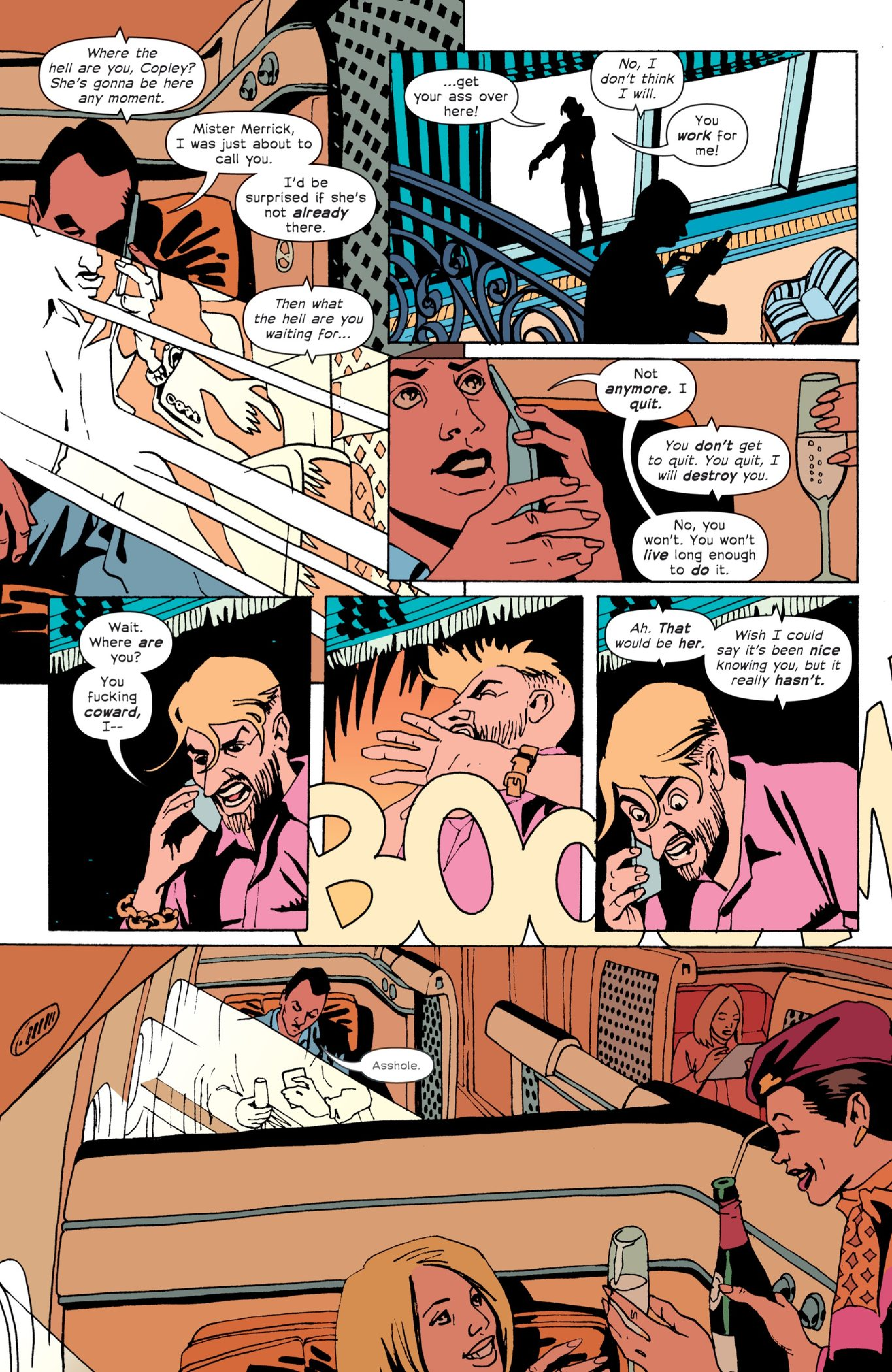

BUDDABUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
BUDDABUDDABUDDA
KNOCK IT OFF!
UDDABUDDA UDDA BUDD
Two of you, old as *dirt,* acting like little *babies!*
You oughta be *ashamed* of yourselves.
Why, Book?
You *know* why.
We want the *same* thing, Andy.

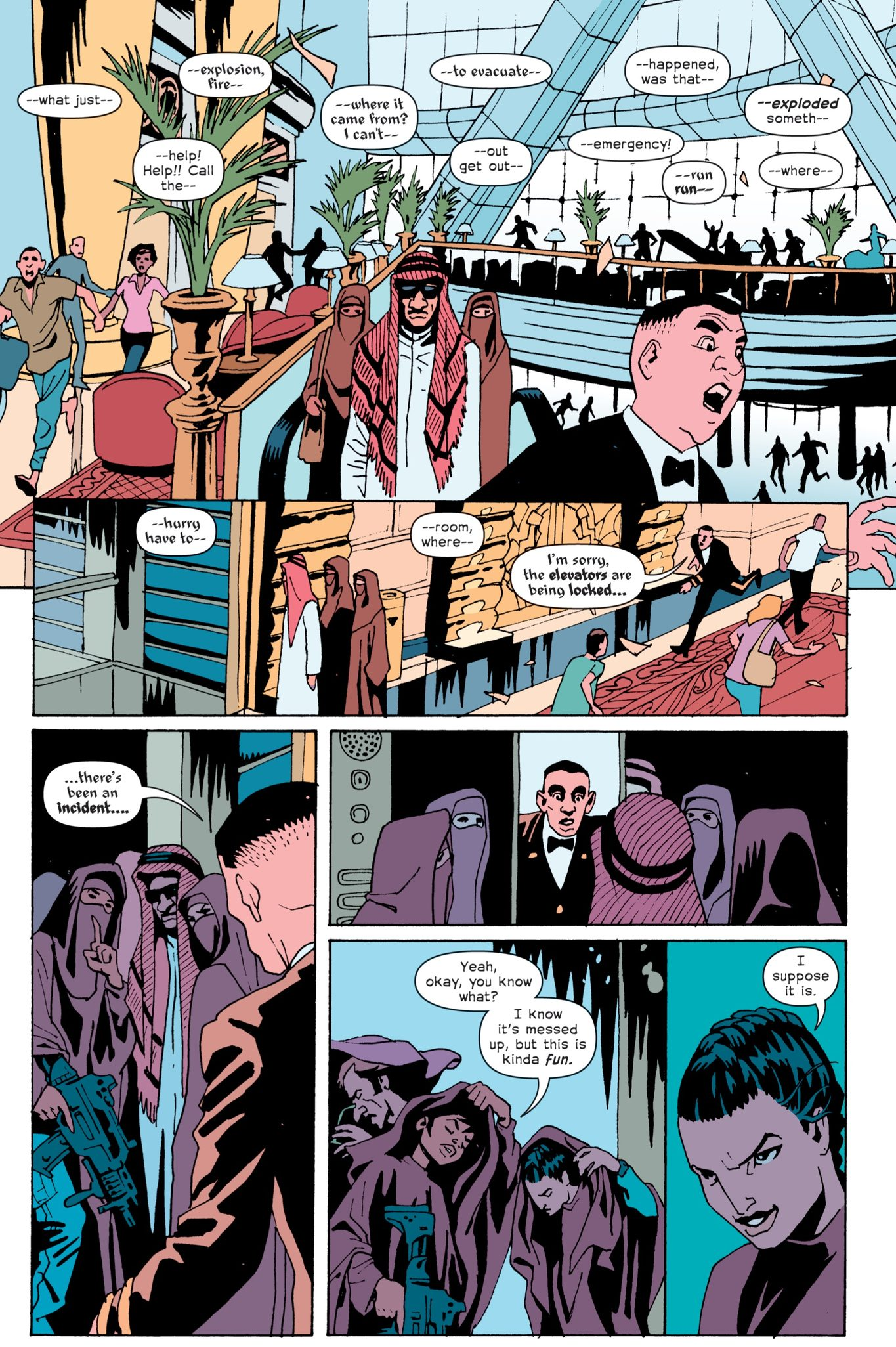

My family **hated** me by the time the last of them **died.**
"I had **four** sons. He was the **youngest.** He was the **last.**
"Cancer **devoured** him."
You think I haven't **seen** it? Watching you drink and fuck away every endless night?
Life means **nothing** if it isn't **worth** living.
This man Copley is working for, his name is Merrick.
Copley said Merrick could figure out **why** we keep on living.
And I thought, if he can do **that** then he can figure out how to make it **stop.**

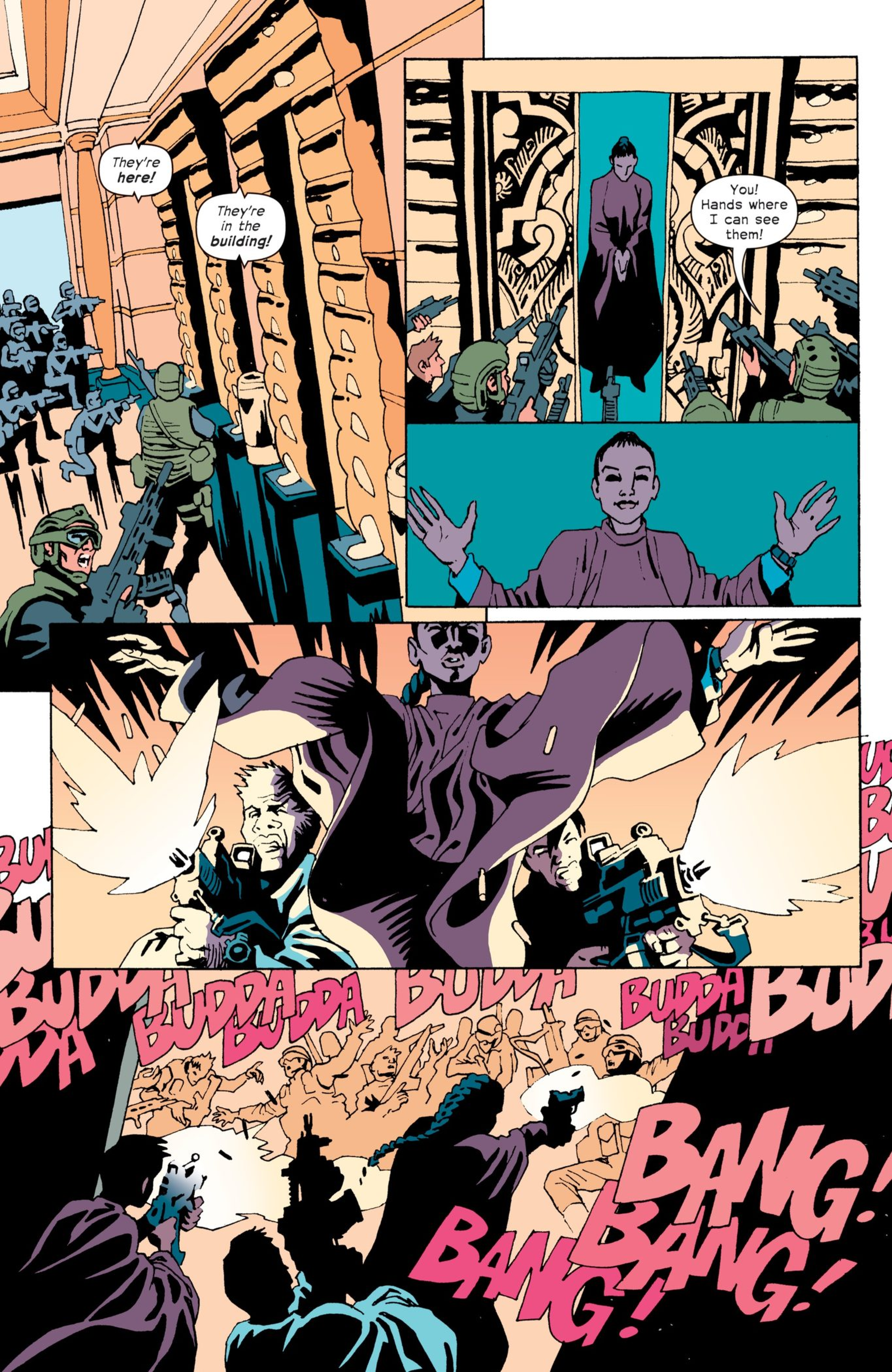

How to make *all* the *years...*
...all the *memories,* all the *loss...*
...all the *loneliness...*
...all of it...
...stop....
And there it is.
Just like that.
And I'm thinking all of a sudden about what Nile said earlier tonight.
"Every day you waste is one you don't get back, right?"
That's ***not*** what I want, Booker.
I want something to live for.
Right ***now,*** that's the people on my ***team.***

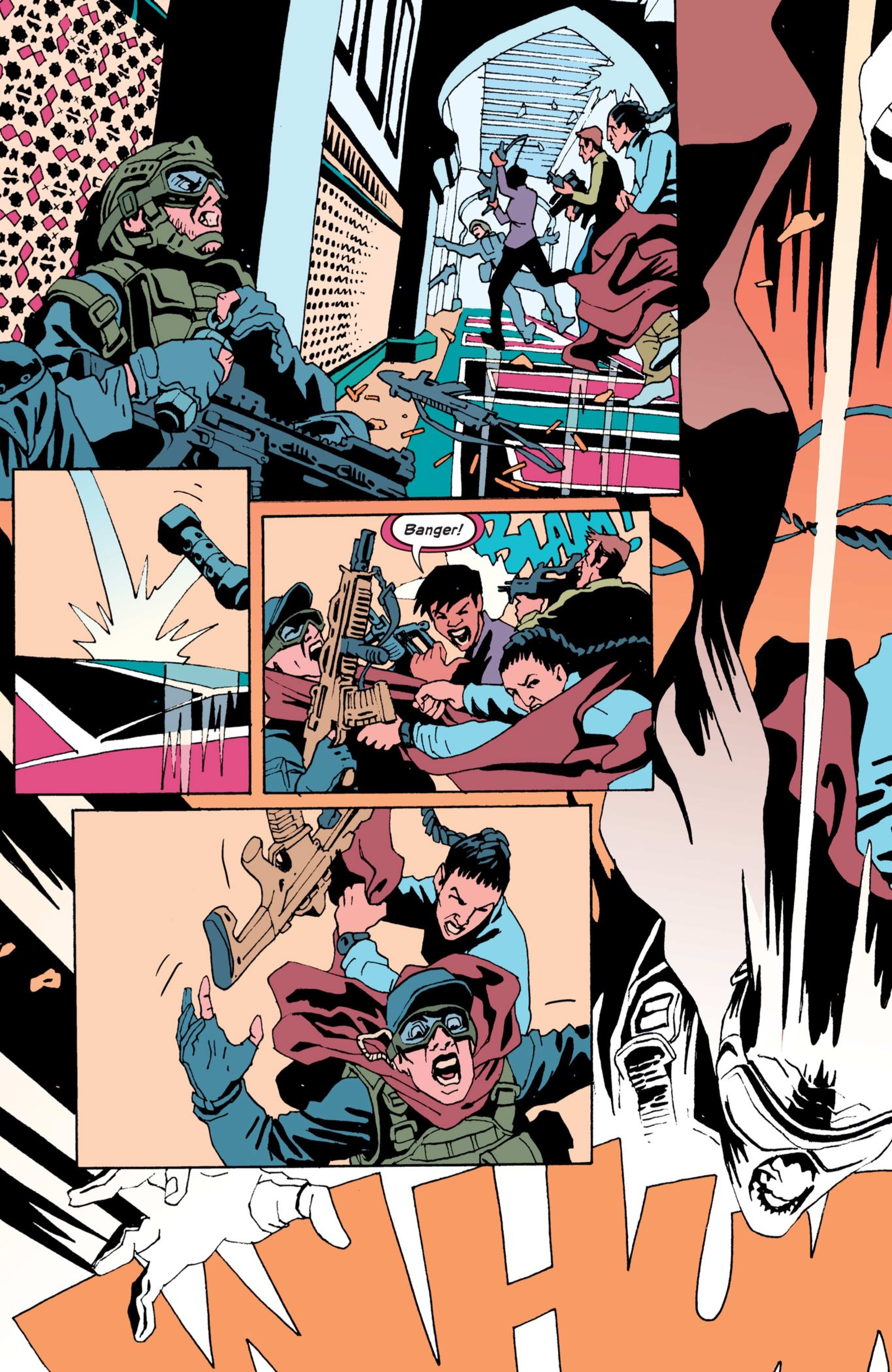

You know where we can find Merrick? Where he's got Nicky and Joe?
Yeah.
You gonna *help* us go and get them?
Oui.
You're gonna have to *own* this, Booker, but that's for *after.*
But you're gonna have to *own* what you've done, you understand?
I do.
Can I count on you?
I'm *part* of the *team,* ain't I?
Yes.
You damn well *are.*

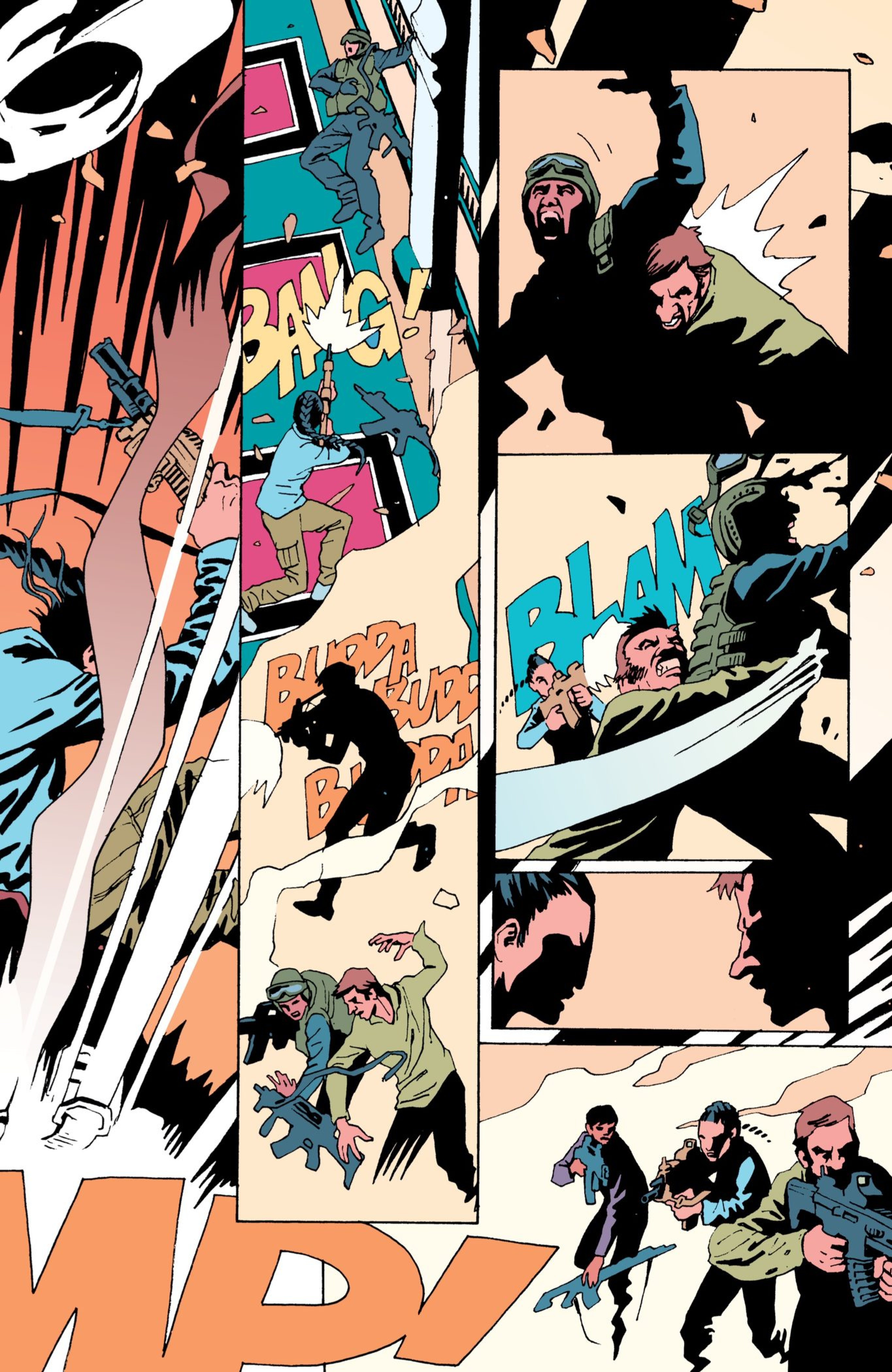

Any *sign* of them?
Not yet. It's *possible* that she's not coming.
And *abandon* her guys? Not on your *life,* she'll be here.
Everyone knows what to do?
They've got *non-lethal* options, for all the *good* it'll do them.
Yeah, but that's the *trick,* Kiley.
You try to *kill* these people, they'll fuck you *up* because you *can't* do it...
...but you hit 'em with *mace* or *flashbangs* or a damn *baseball bat* across the back of the *skull,* they'll fall just like *everyone* else.
Yes, sir.
Where's *Copley?*
I've no idea, sir.
I'm going back to the *suite...*
...let me know as *soon* as she gets here.
Of course, Mister Merrick.

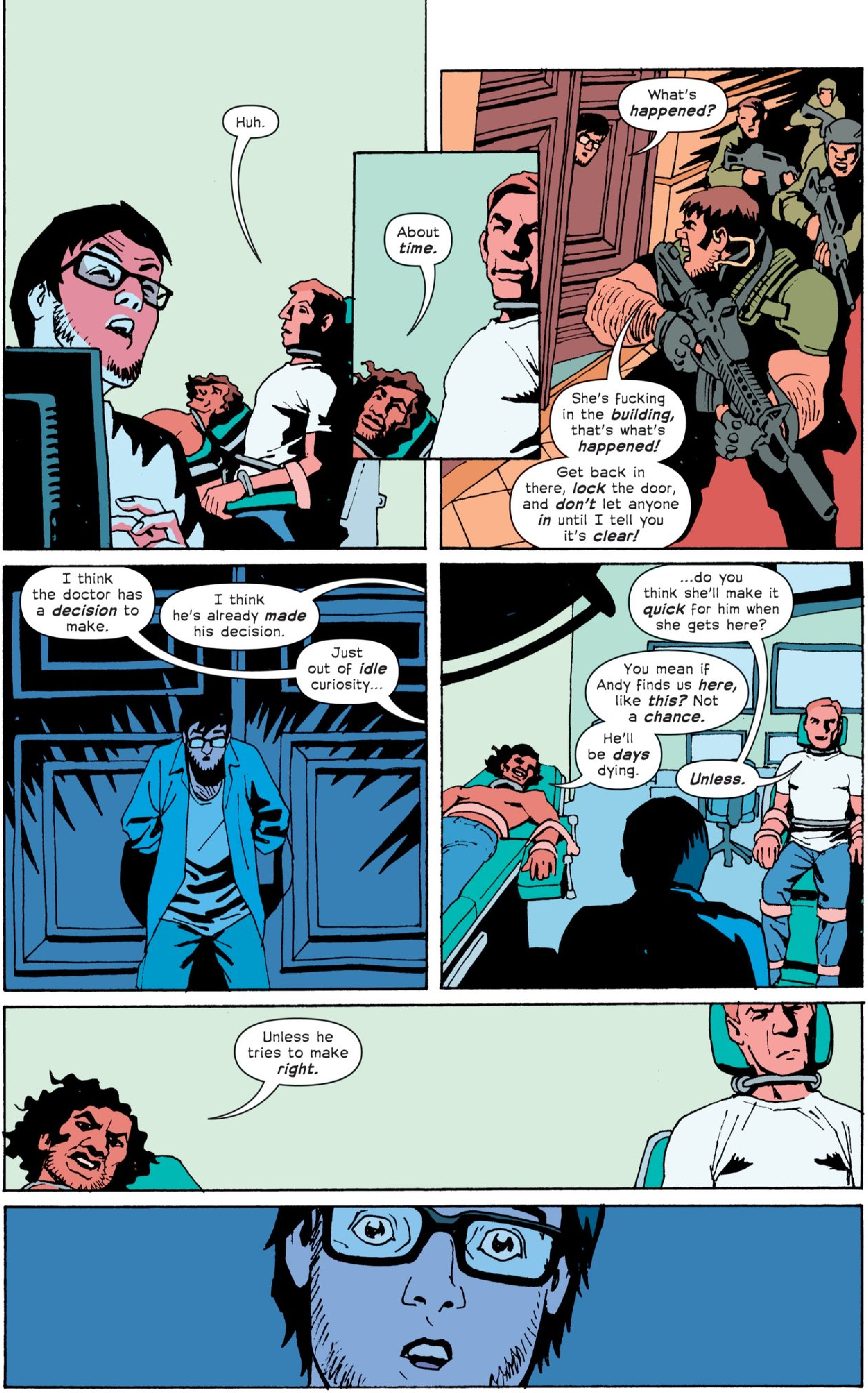

Where the hell are you, Copley? She's gonna be here any moment.
Mister Merrick, I was just about to call you.
I'd be surprised if she's not *already* there.
Then what the hell are you waiting for...
...get your ass over here!
No, I don't think I will.
You *work* for me!
Not *anymore.* I *quit.*
You *don't* get to quit. You quit, I will *destroy* you.
No, you won't. You won't *live* long enough to *do* it.
Wait. Where *are* you?
You fucking *coward,* I--
BOOM
Ah. *That* would be *her.*
Wish I could say it's been *nice* knowing you, but it really *hasn't.*
Asshole.

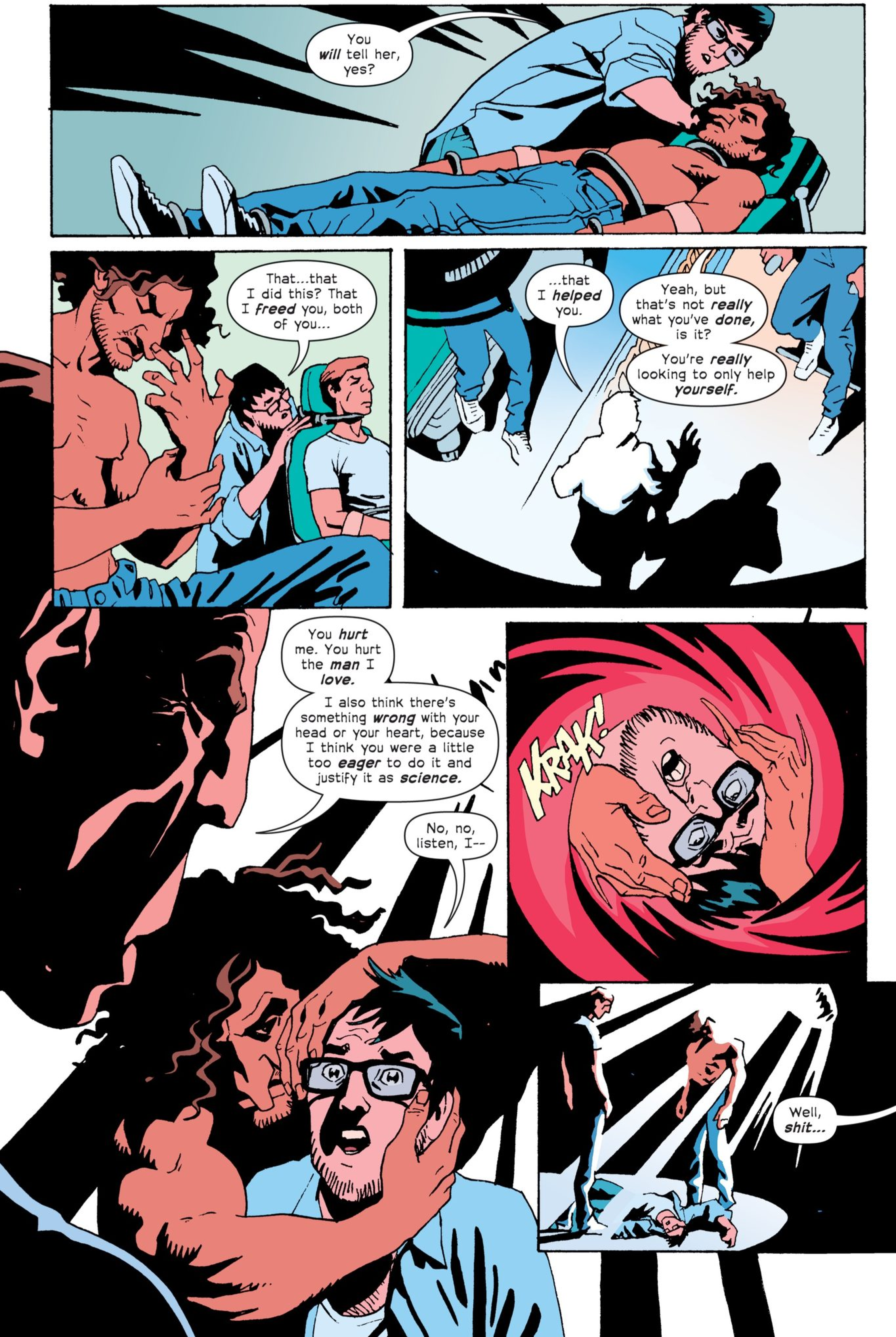

--what just--
--explosion, fire--
--help! Help!! Call the--
--where it came from? I can't--
--to evacuate--
--out get out--
--emergency!
--happened, was that--
--run run--
--exploded someth--
--where--
--hurry have to--
--room, where--
I'm sorry, the elevators are being locked...
...there's been an incident....
Yeah, okay, you know what?
I know it's messed up, but this is kinda fun.
I suppose it is.

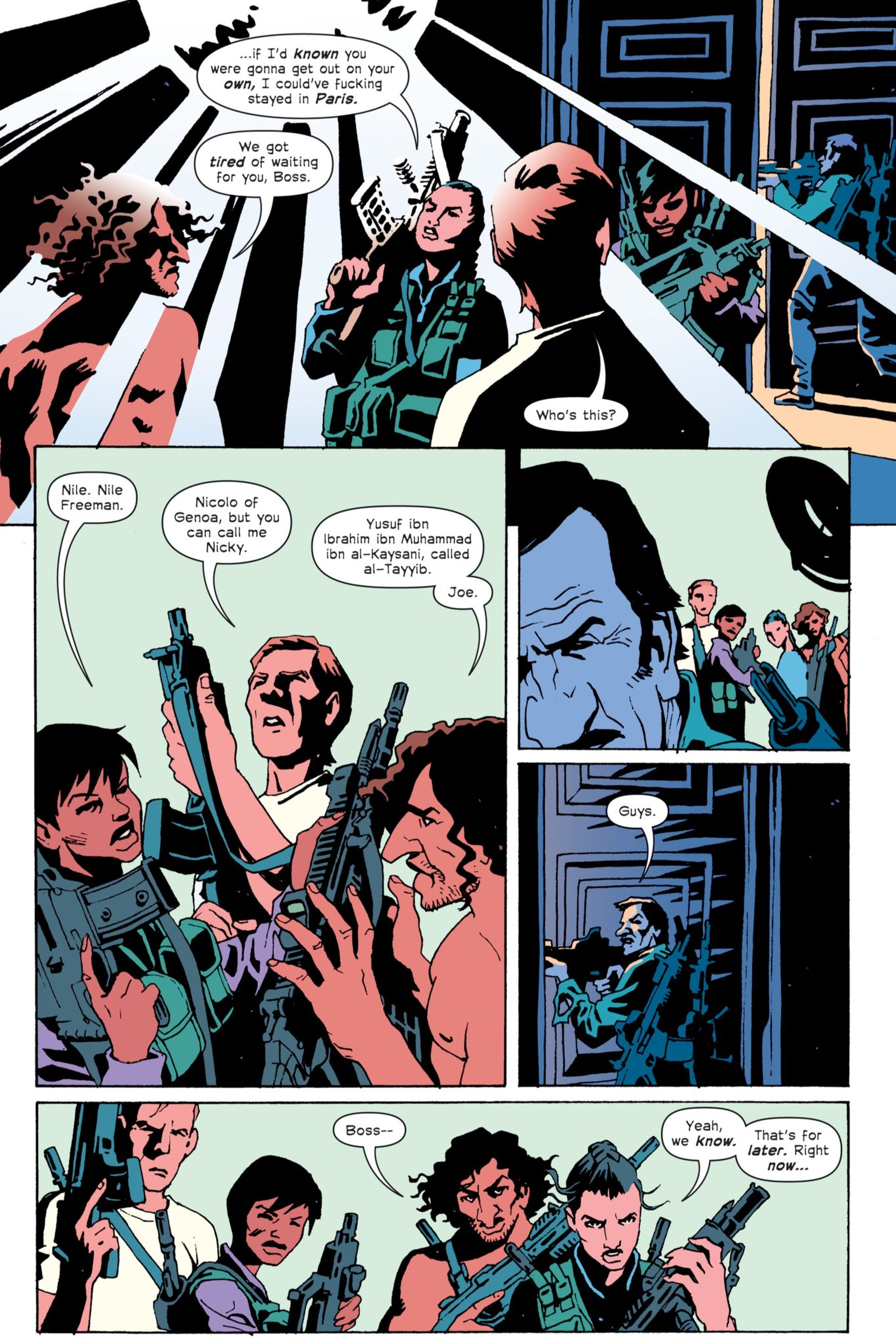

They're here!
They're in the building!
You! Hands where I can see them!
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA BUDD!!
BANG!
BANG!
BANG!

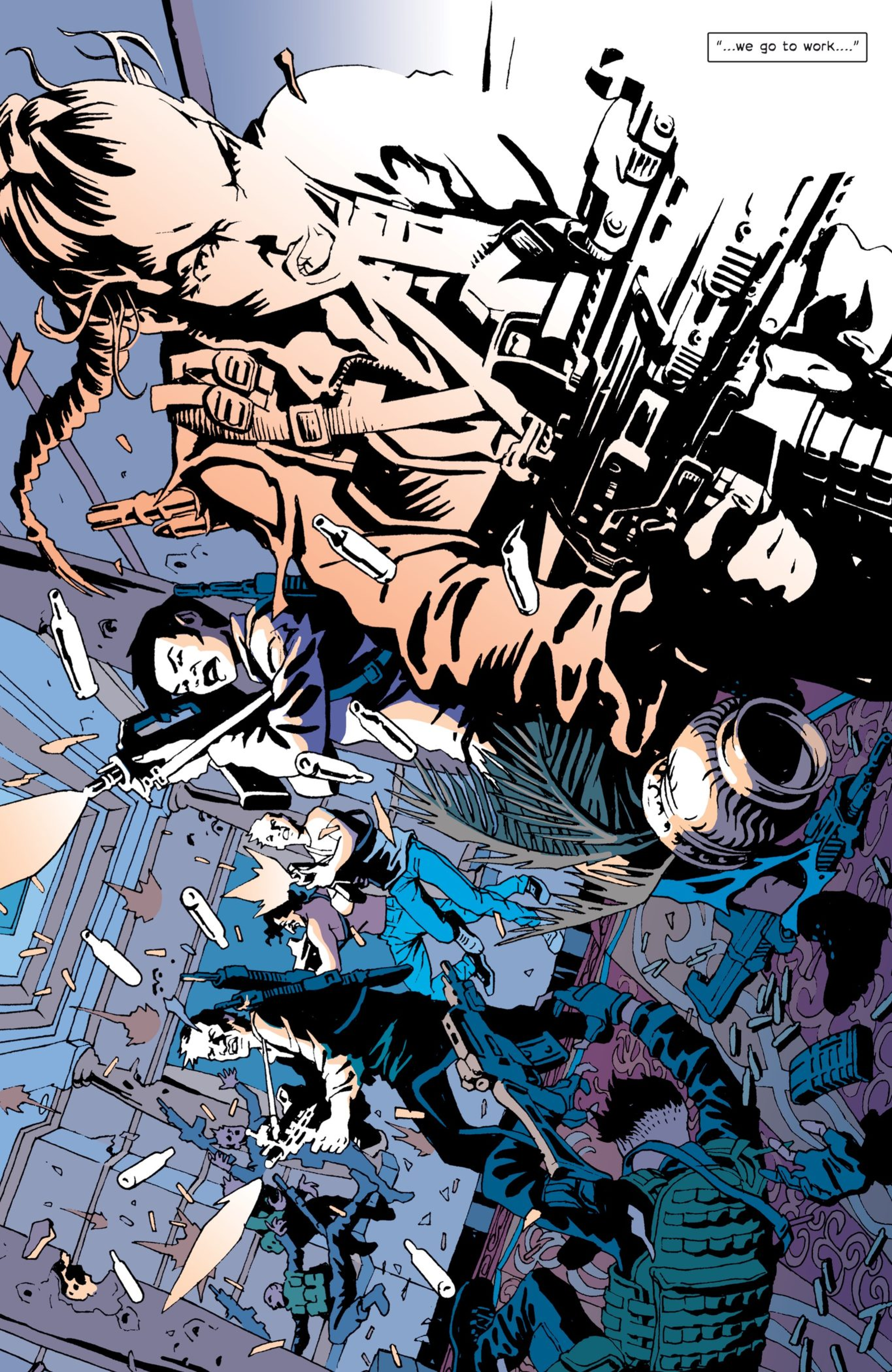

Banger!
BLAM!
WHHW

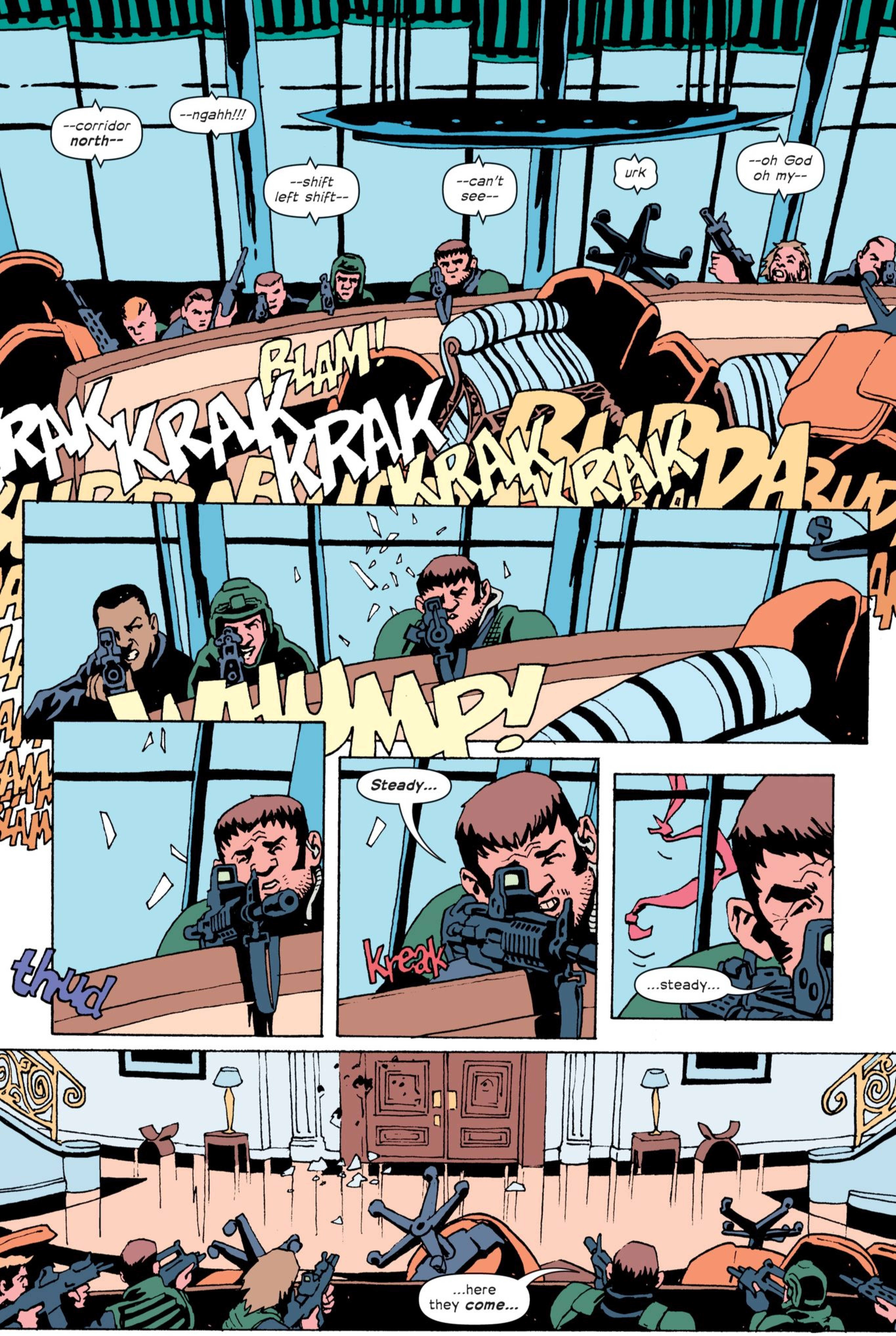

BANG!
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BLAM
MP!

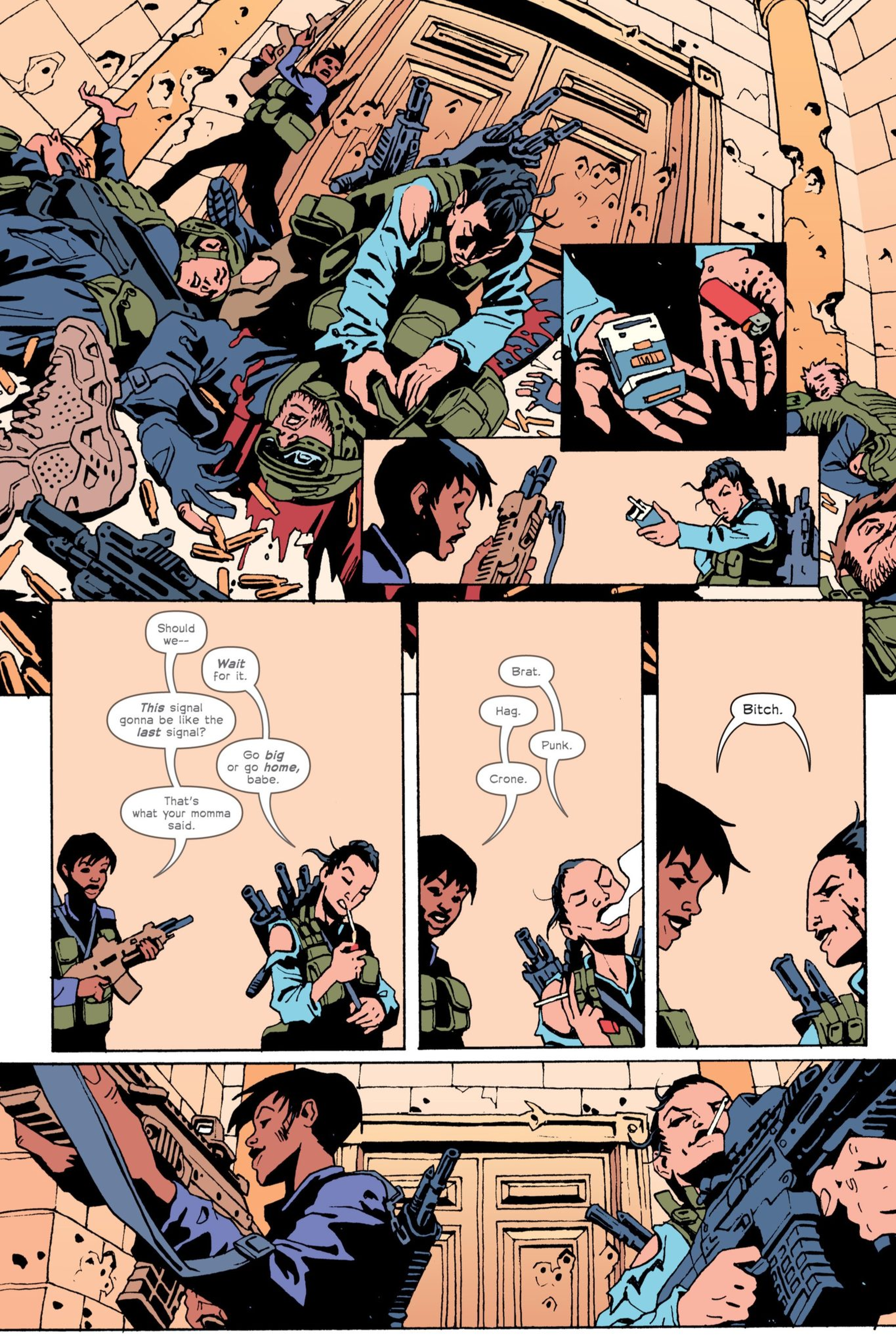

Huh.
About *time.*
What's *happened?*
She's fucking in the *building,* that's what's *happened!*
Get back in there, *lock* the door, and *don't* let anyone *in* until I tell you it's *clear!*
I think the doctor has a *decision* to make.
I think he's already *made* his decision.
Just out of *idle* curiosity...
...do you think she'll make it *quick* for him when she gets here?
You mean if Andy finds us *here,* like *this?* Not a *chance.*
He'll be *days* dying.
Unless.
Unless he tries to make *right.*

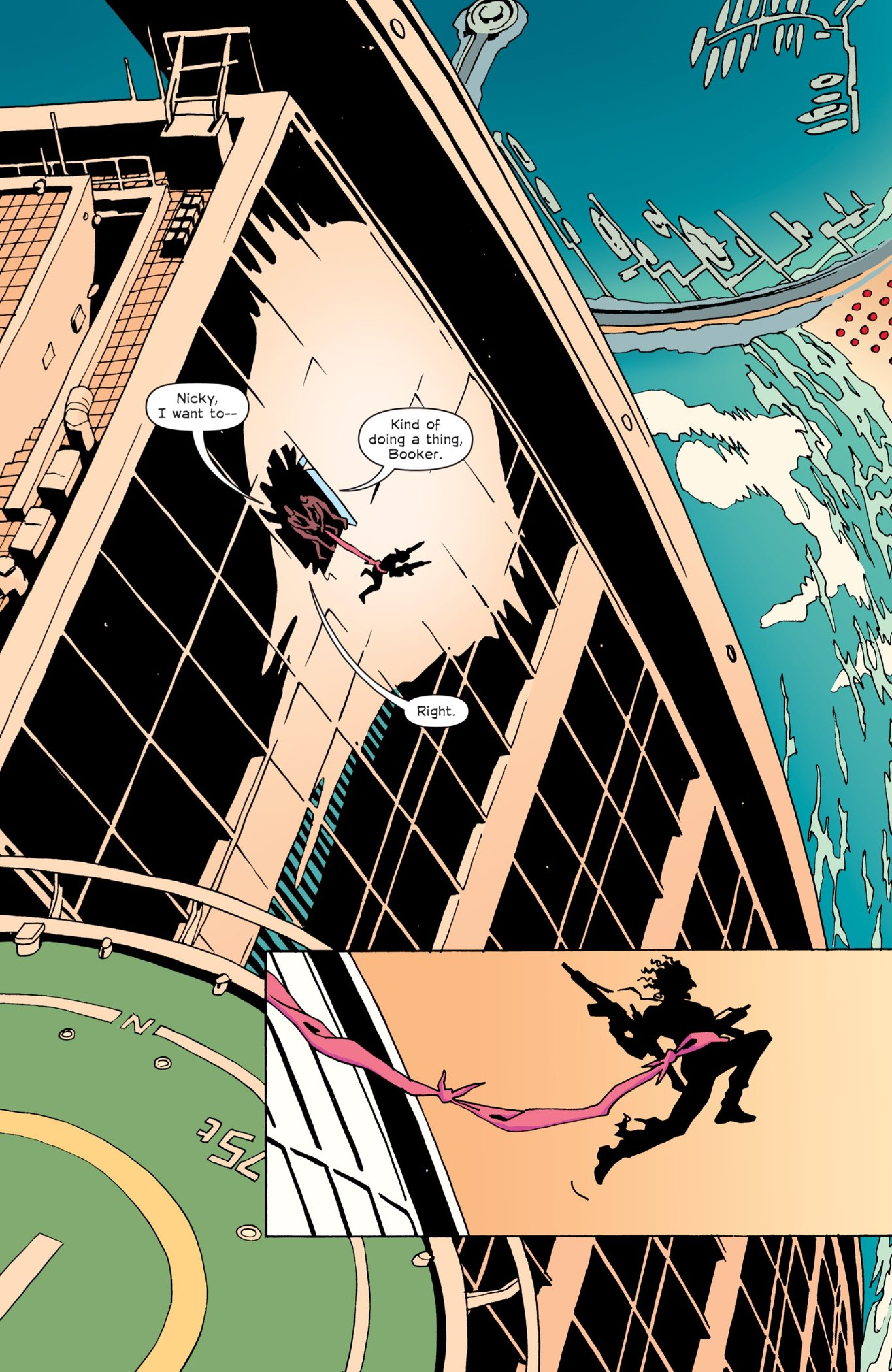

You *will* tell her, yes?
That...that I did this? That I *freed* you, both of you...
...that I *helped* you.
Yeah, but that's not *really* what you've *done,* is it?
You're *really* looking to only help *yourself.*
You *hurt* me. You hurt the *man* I *love.*
I also think there's something *wrong* with your head or your heart, because I think you were a little too *eager* to do it and justify it as *science.*
No, no, listen, I--
KRAK!
Well, *shit...*

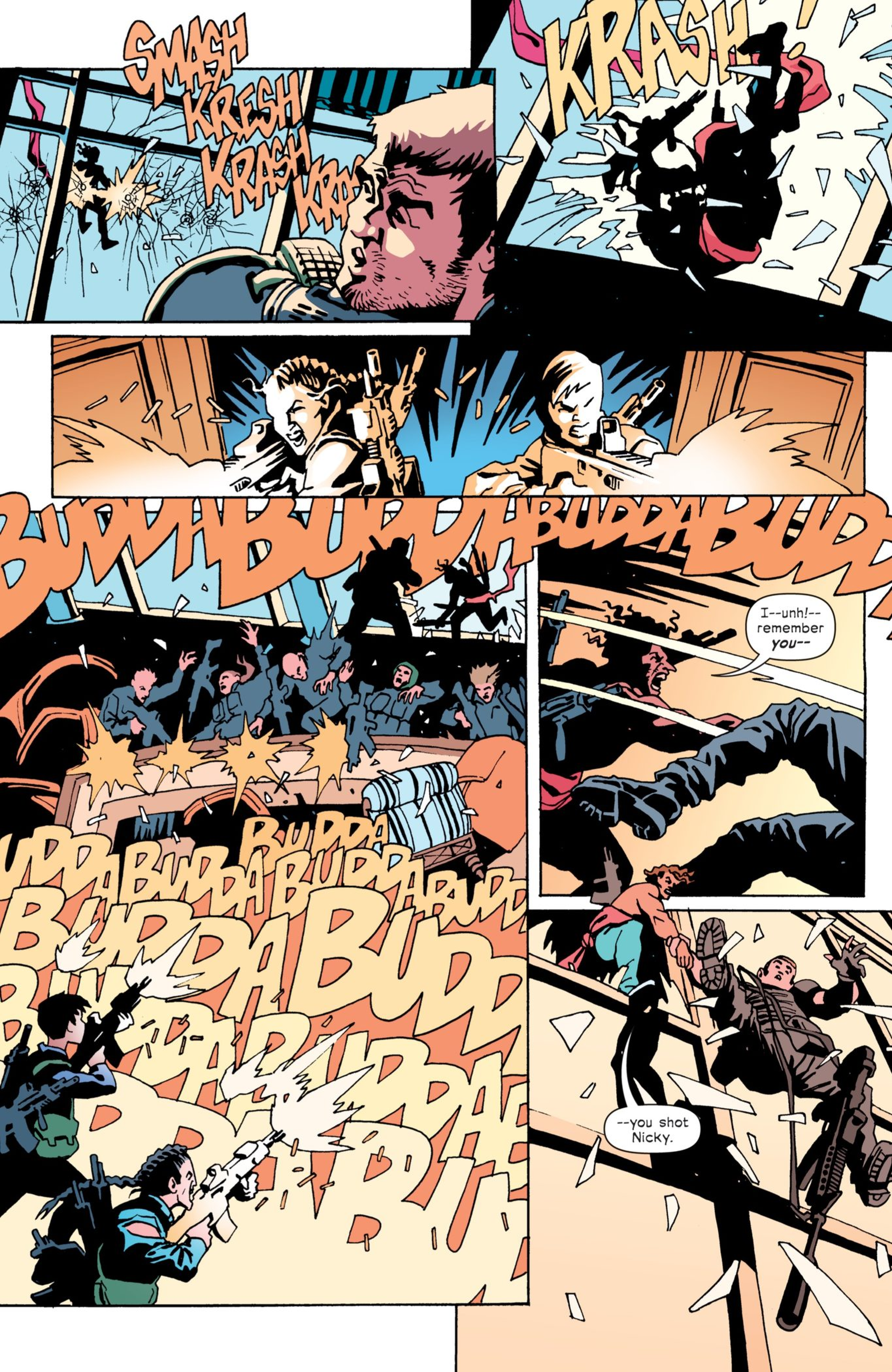

...if I'd known you were gonna get out on your own, I could've fucking stayed in Paris.
We got tired of waiting for you, Boss.
Who's this?
Nile. Nile Freeman.
Nicolo of Genoa, but you can call me Nicky.
Yusuf ibn Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn al-Kaysani, called al-Tayyib.
Joe.
Guys.
Boss--
Yeah, we know.
That's for later. Right now...

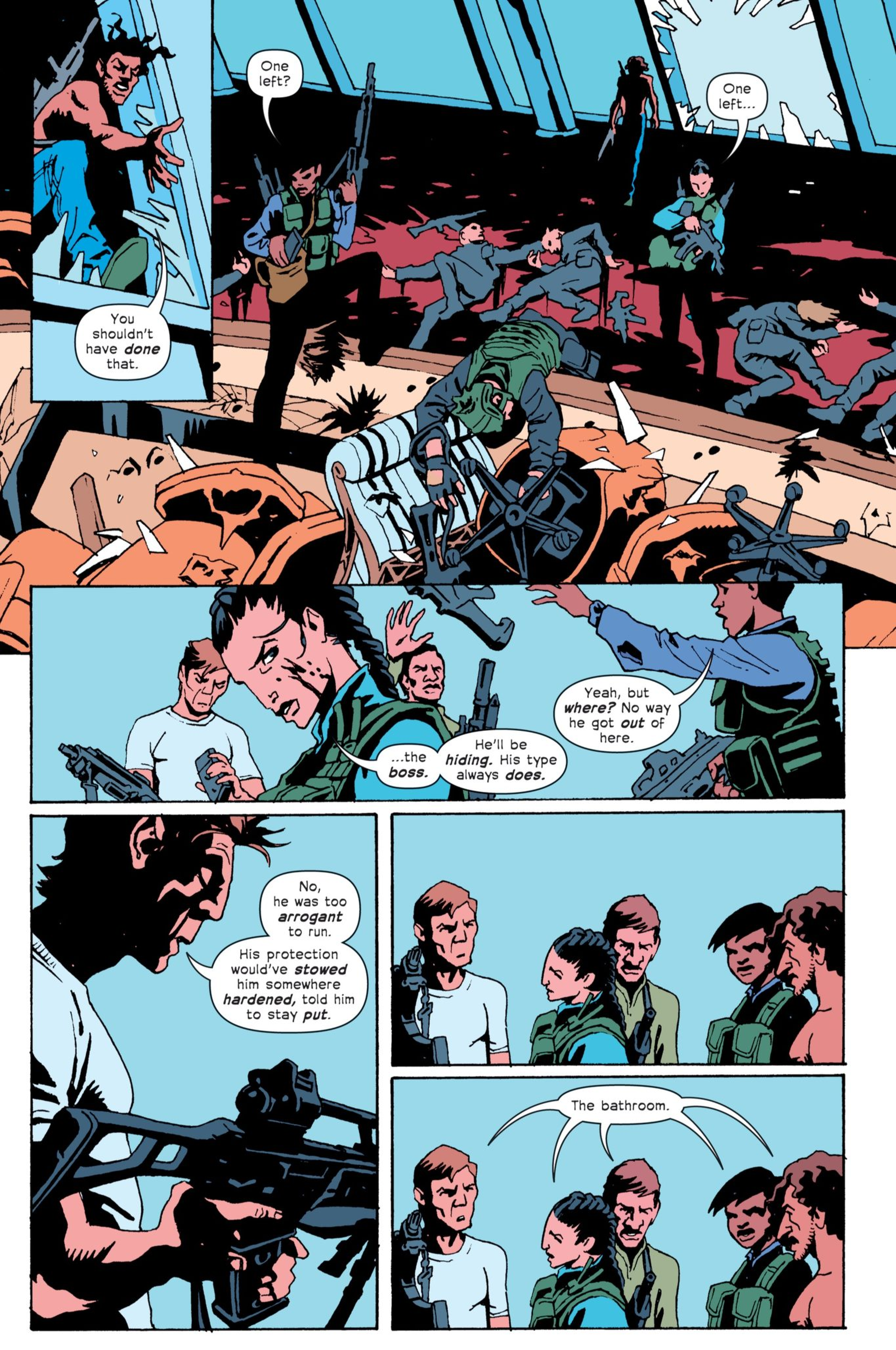

"...we go to work...."


--corridor north--
--ngahh!!!
--shift left shift--
--can't see--
urk
--oh God oh my--
BLAM!
KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK
BLAM
DA
WHUMP!
thud
Steady...
kreak
...steady...
...here they come...

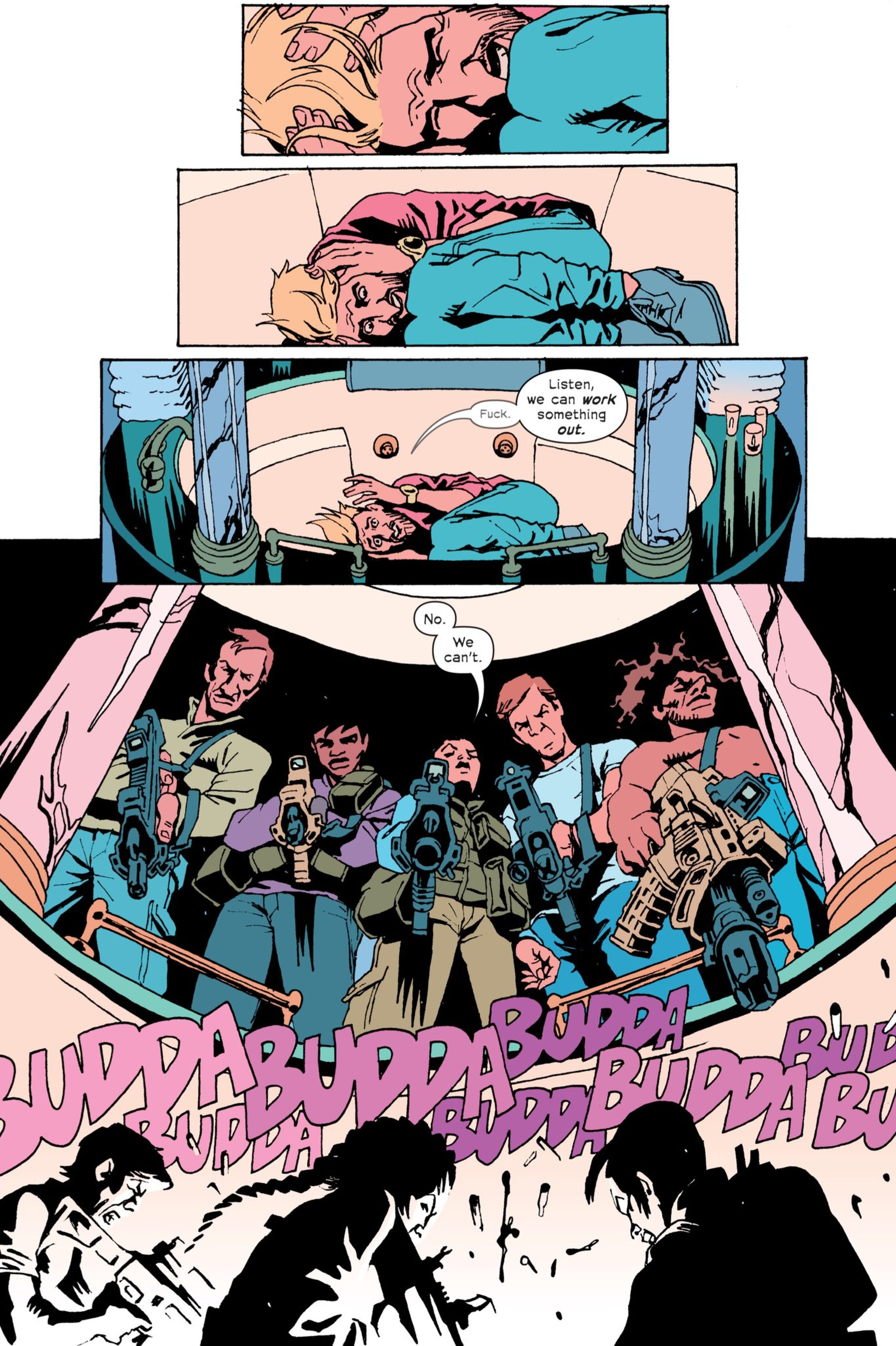

Should we--
Wait for it.
This signal gonna be like the *last* signal?
Go *big* or go *home,* babe.
That's what your momma said.
Brat.
Hag.
Punk.
Crone.
Bitch.

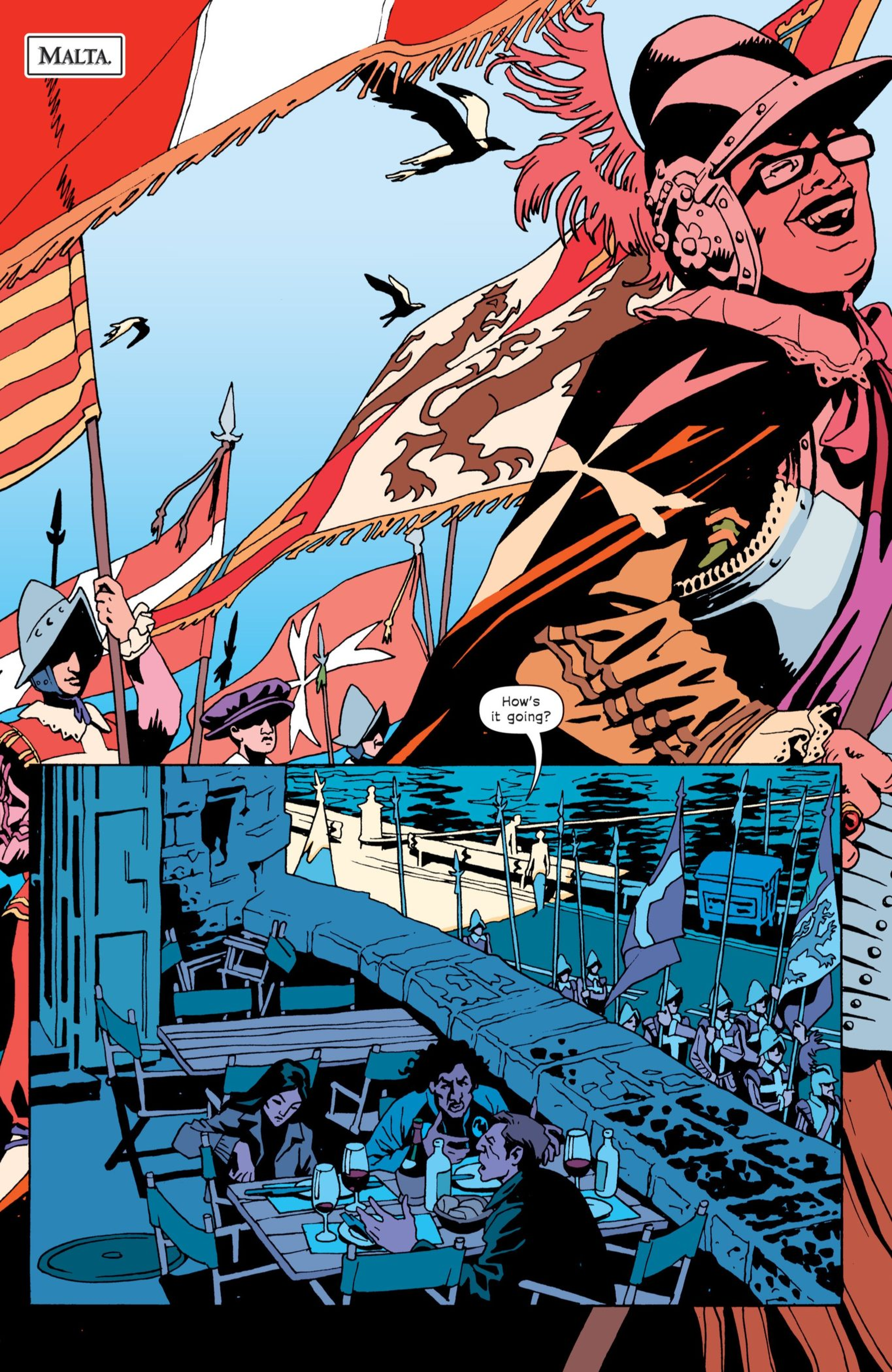

Nicky, I want to--
Kind of doing a thing, Booker.
Right.

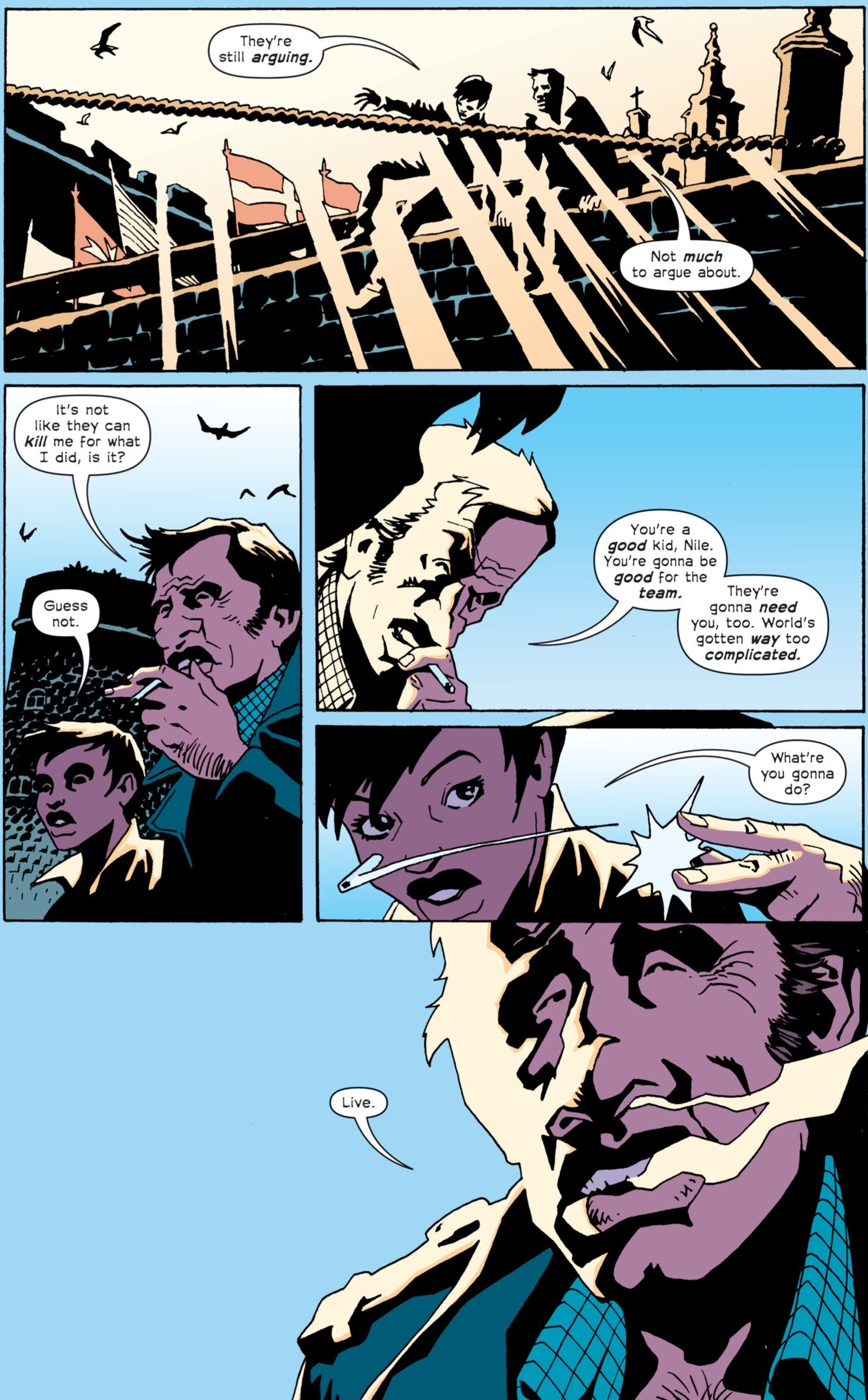

SMASH
KRESH
KRASH
KRO
KRASH!
BUDDABUDDABUDDABUDD
I--unh!--remember *you*--
BUDDABUDDABUDDABUDDABUDD
--you shot Nicky.

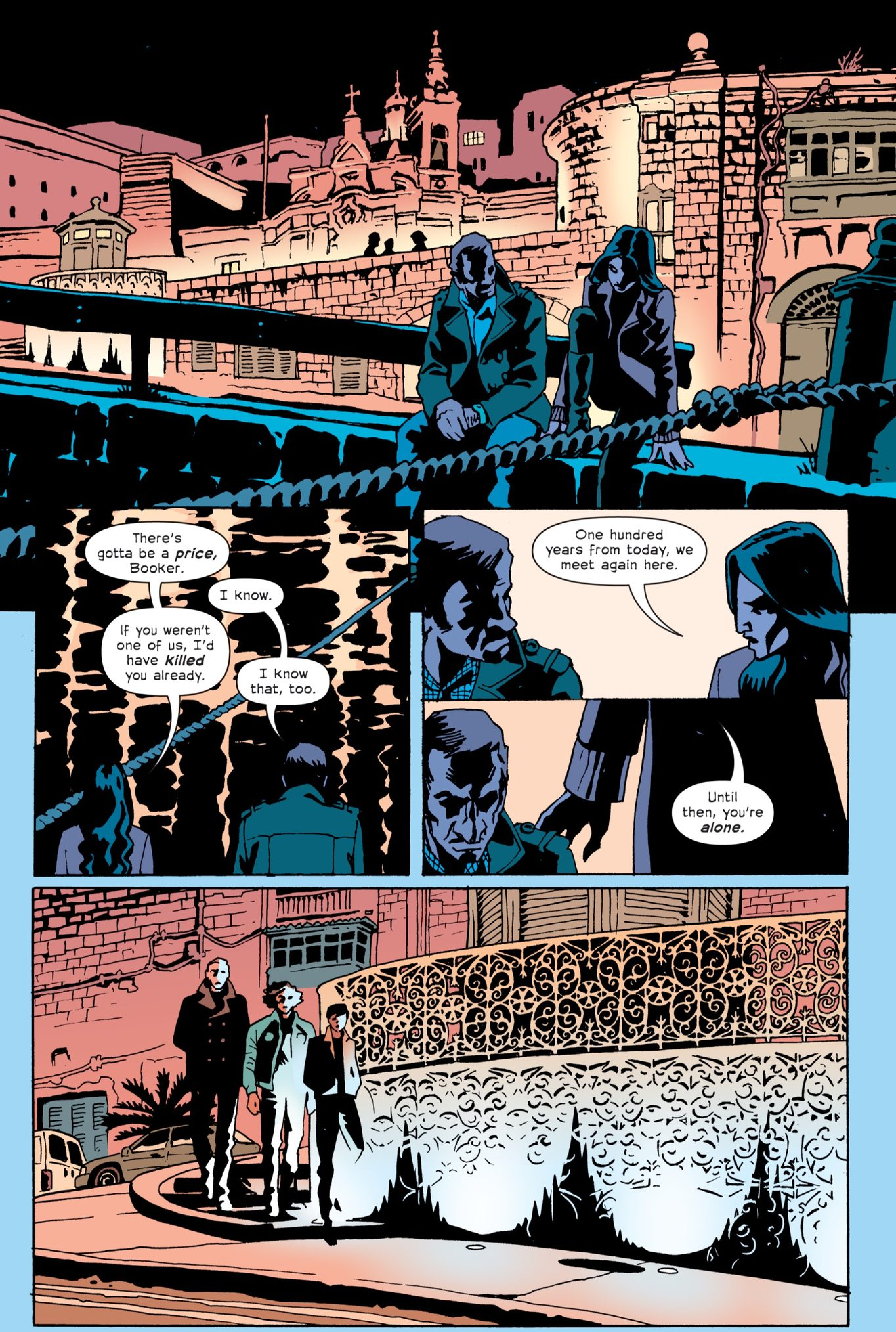


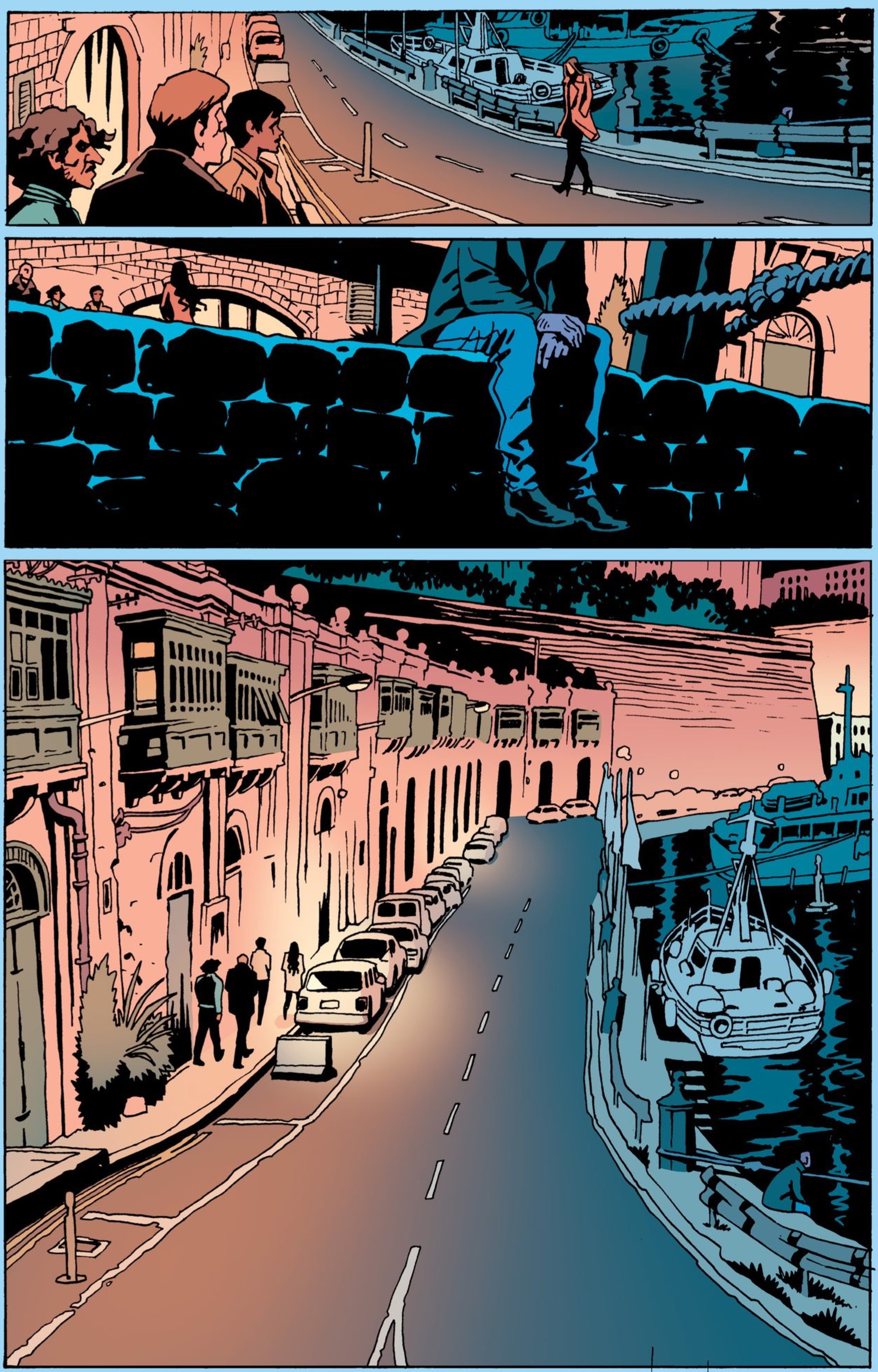
You shouldn't have *done* that.
One left?
One left...
Yeah, but *where?* No way he got *out* of here.
...the *boss.*
He'll be *hiding.* His type always *does.*
No, he was too *arrogant* to run.
His protection would've *stowed* him somewhere *hardened,* told him to stay *put.*
The bathroom.


Fuck.
Listen, we can *work* something *out.*
No.
We can't.
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BU
BU


MALTA.
How's it going?


They're still *arguing.*
Not *much* to argue about.
It's not like they can *kill* me for what I did, is it?
Guess not.
You're a *good* kid, Nile. You're gonna be *good* for the *team.*
They're gonna *need* you, too. World's gotten *way* too *complicated.*
What're you gonna do?
Live.


There's gotta be a *price,* Booker.
I know.
If you weren't one of us, I'd have *killed* you already.
I know that, too.
One hundred years from today, we meet again here.
Until then, you're *alone.*



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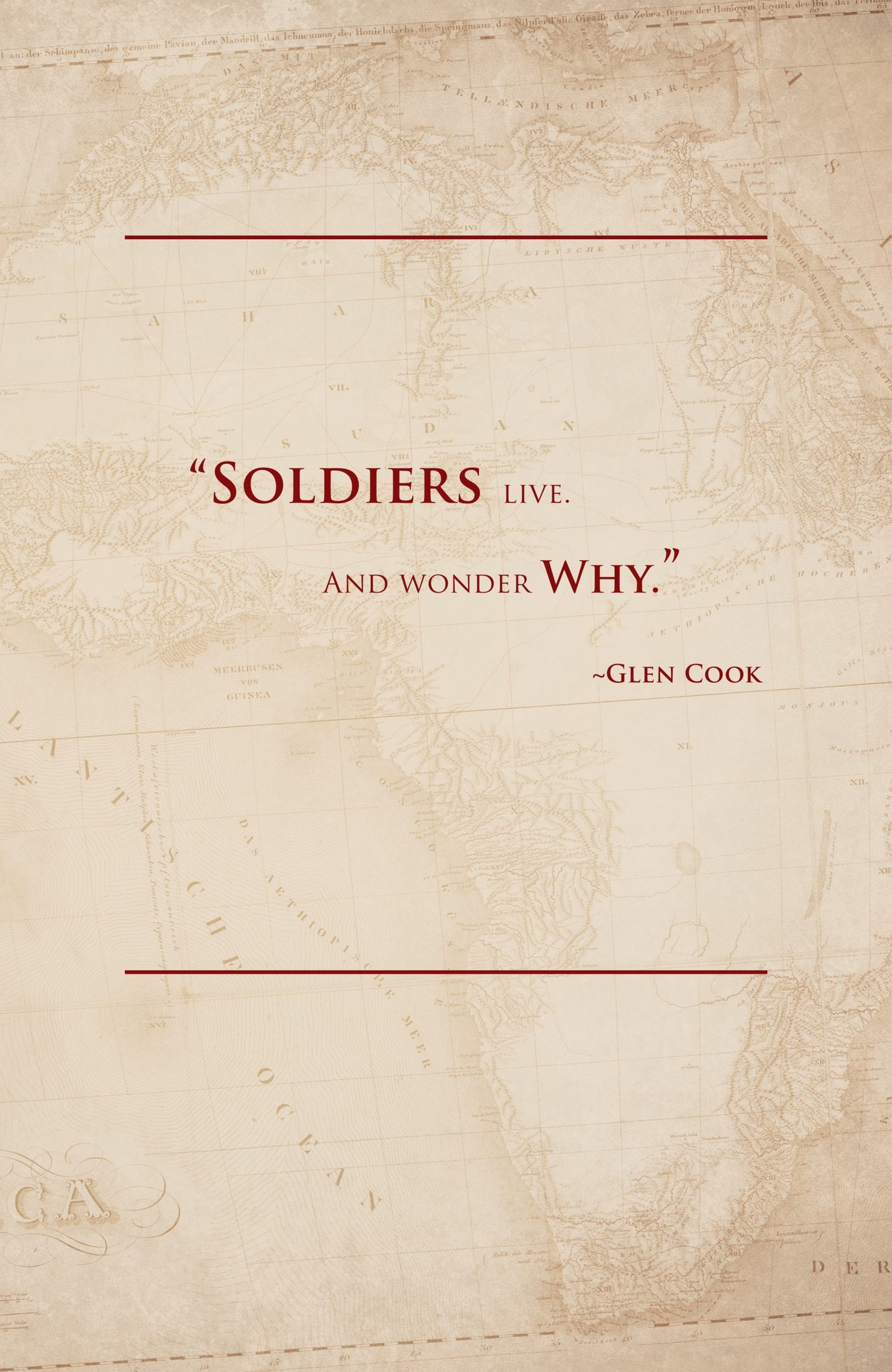

an: der Schimpanse, der gemeine Pavian, der Mandrill, das Ichneumon, der Honichdachs, die Springmaus, das Nilpferd, die Giraffe, das Zebra, ferner der Honigguckguck, der Ibis, das Termiten
TELLÆNDISCHE MEER
LIBYSCHE WÜSTE
SAHARA
SUDAN
AETHIOPISCHE HOCHEBENE
MEERBUSEN VON GUINEA
ATLANTISCHE OCEAN
DAS AETHIOPISCHE MEER
DER ARABISCHE MEERBUSEN
MONOUS
CA
DER

“Soldiers live.

And wonder Why.”

~Glen Cook

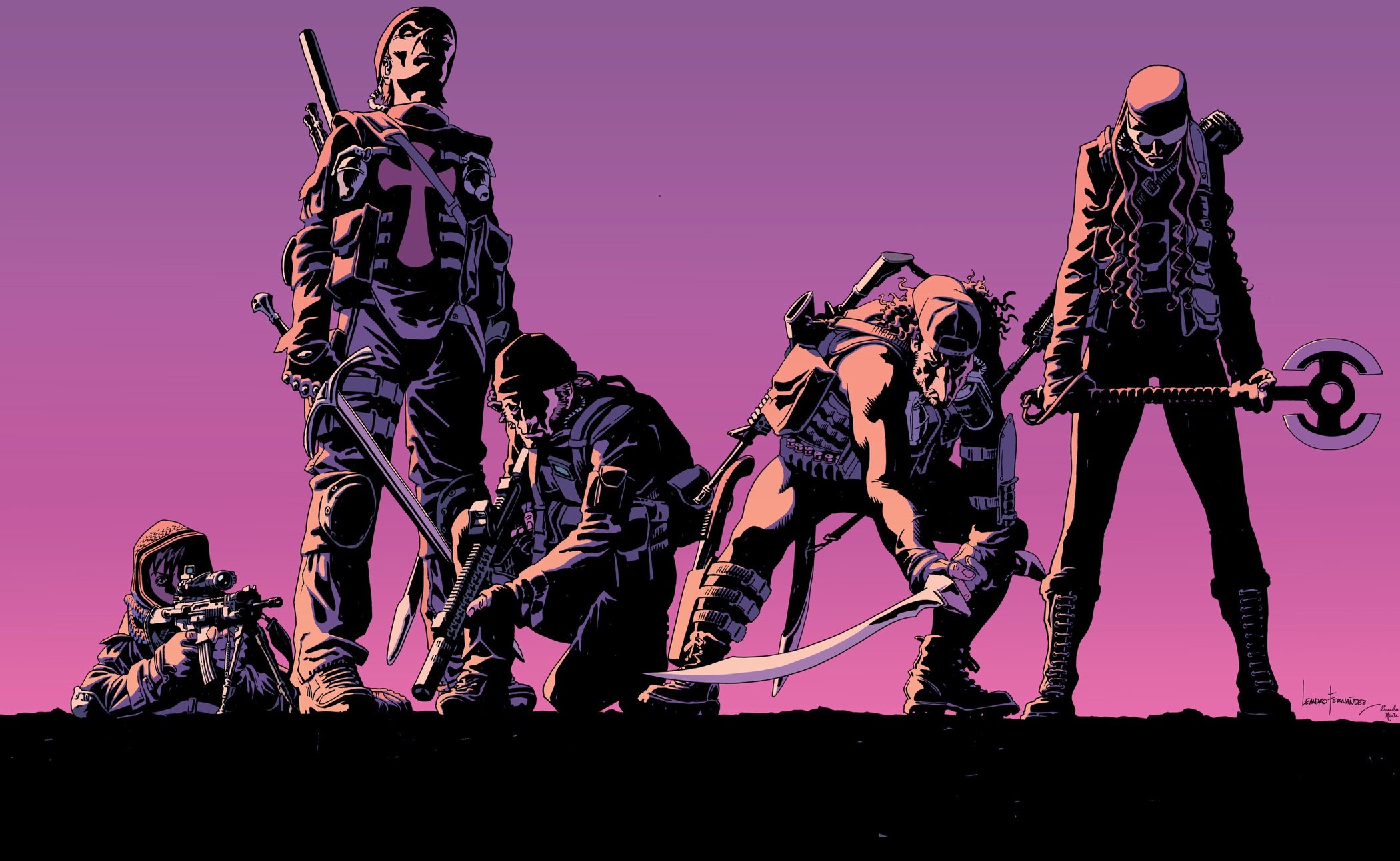
THE OLD GUARD™

WILL RETURN...

Leandro Fernandez

Pin-up by *LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ*

Pin-up by *LEANDRO FERNÁNDEZ*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Daniela Miwa

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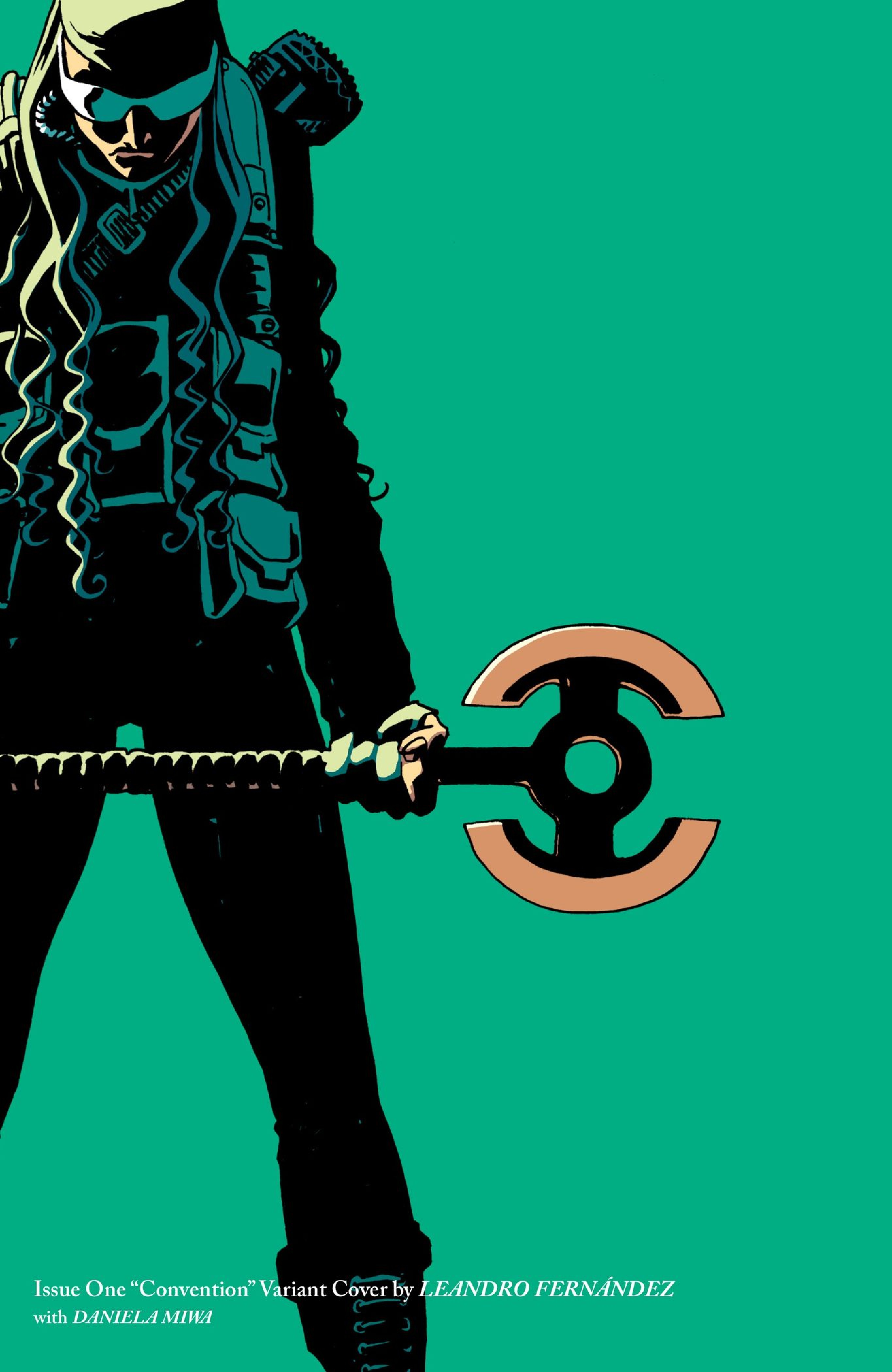

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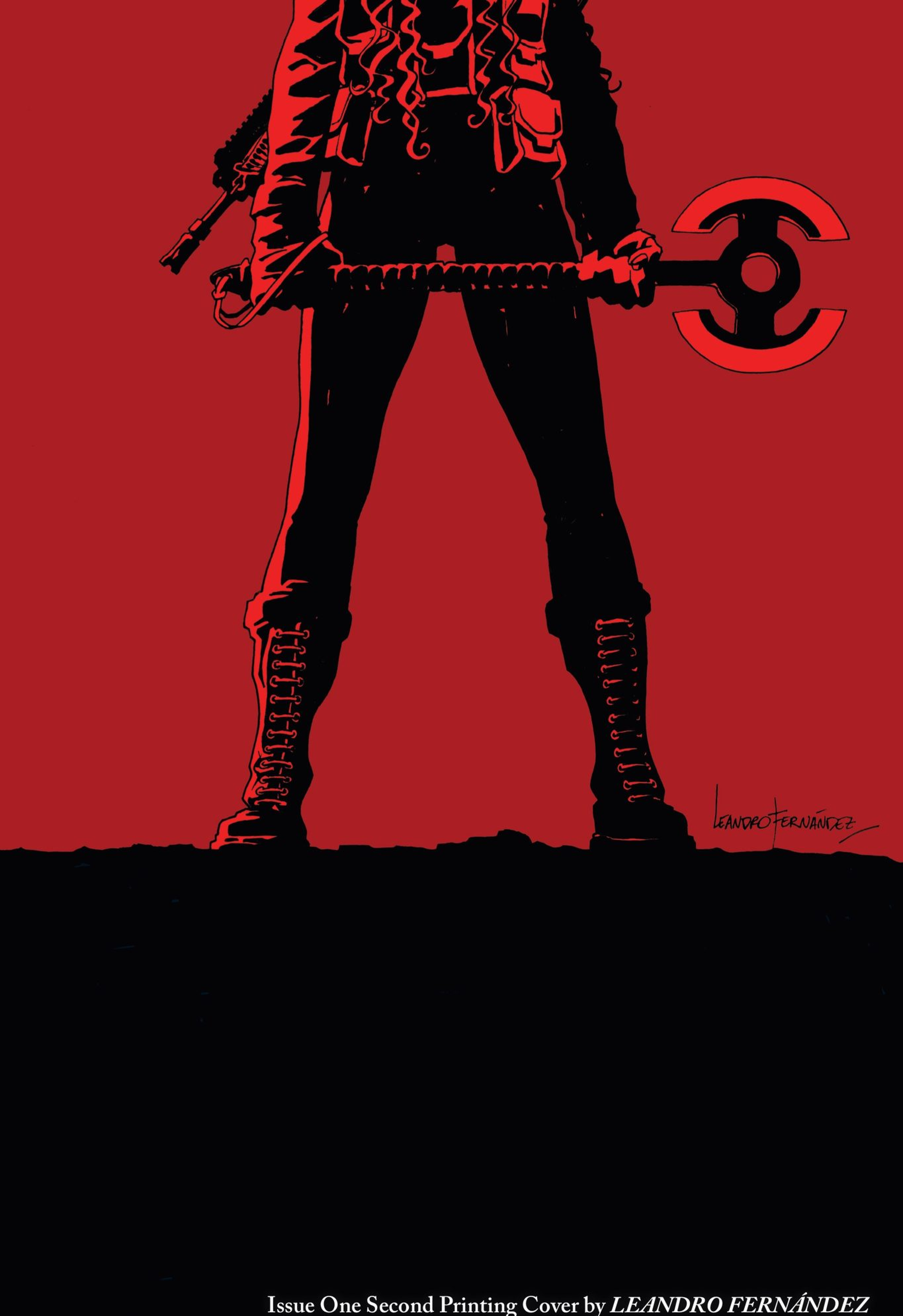
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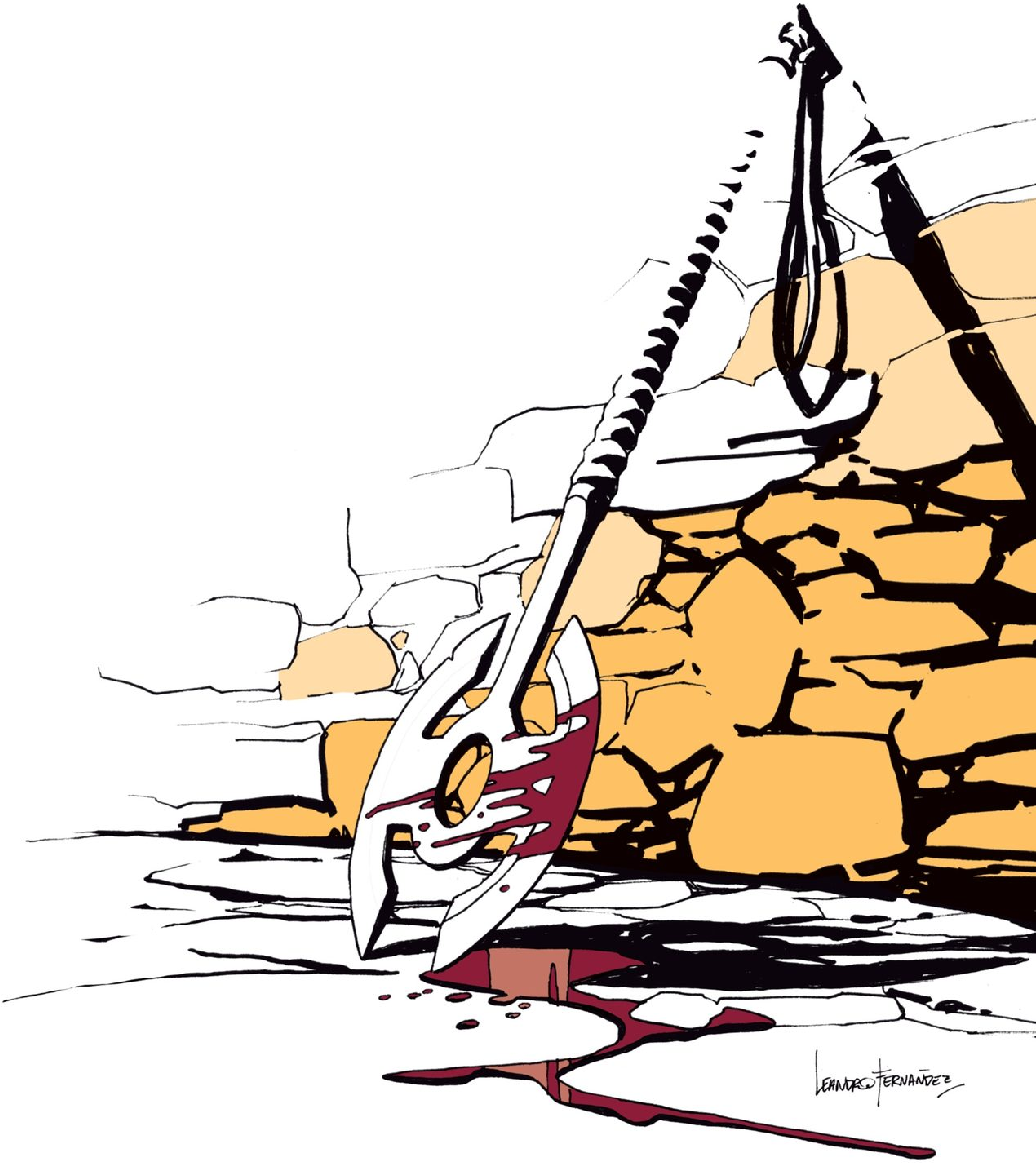
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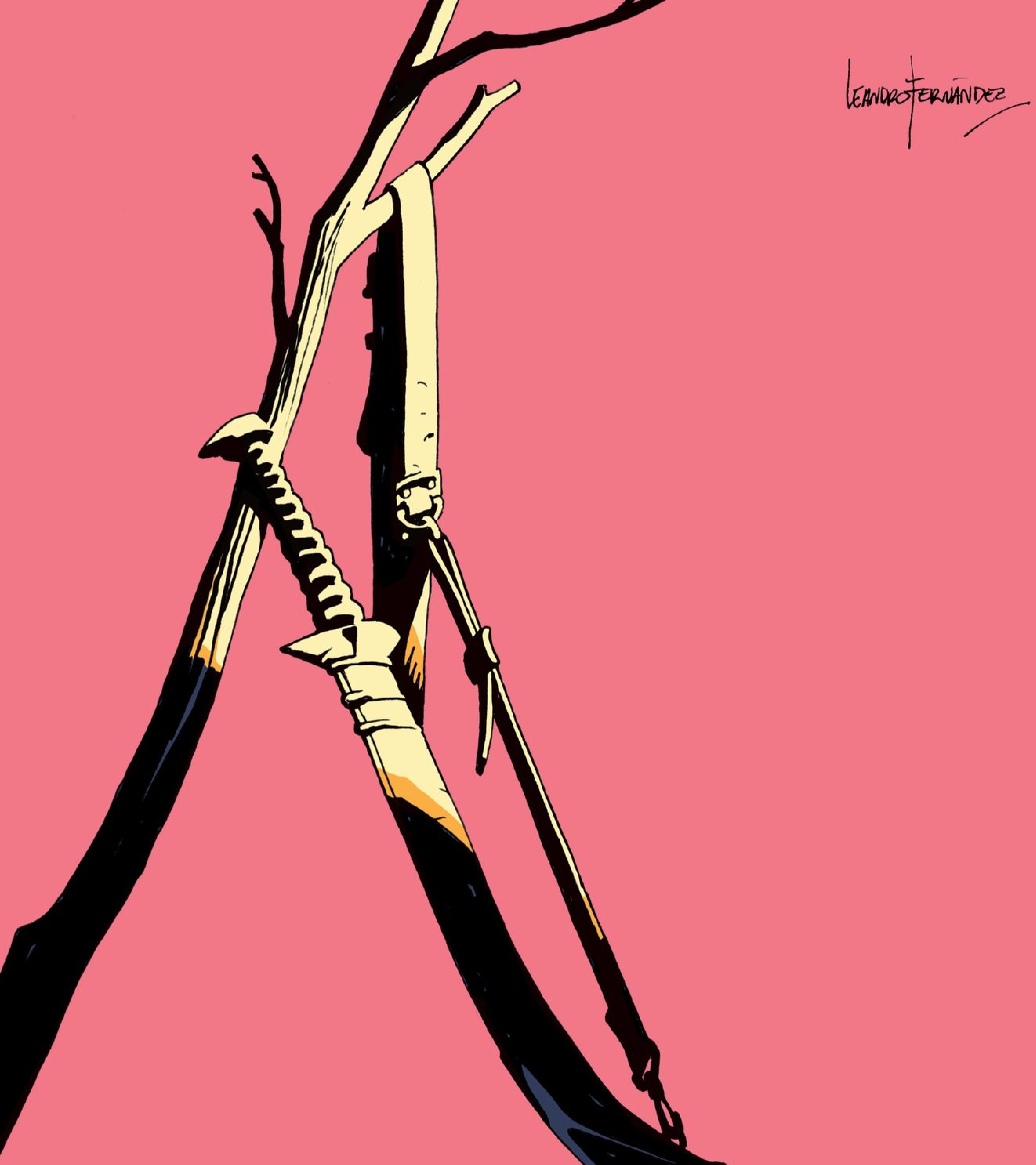
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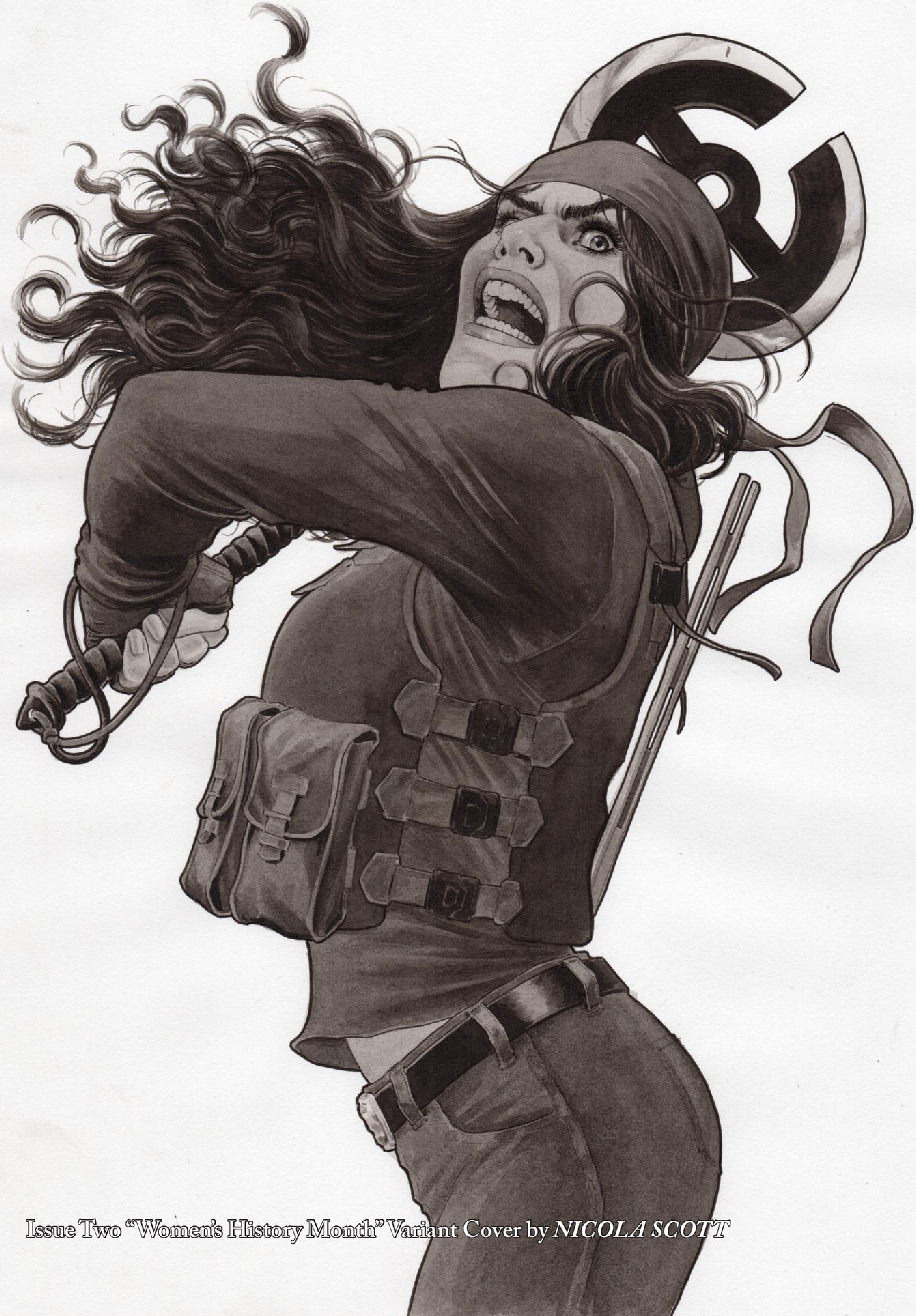

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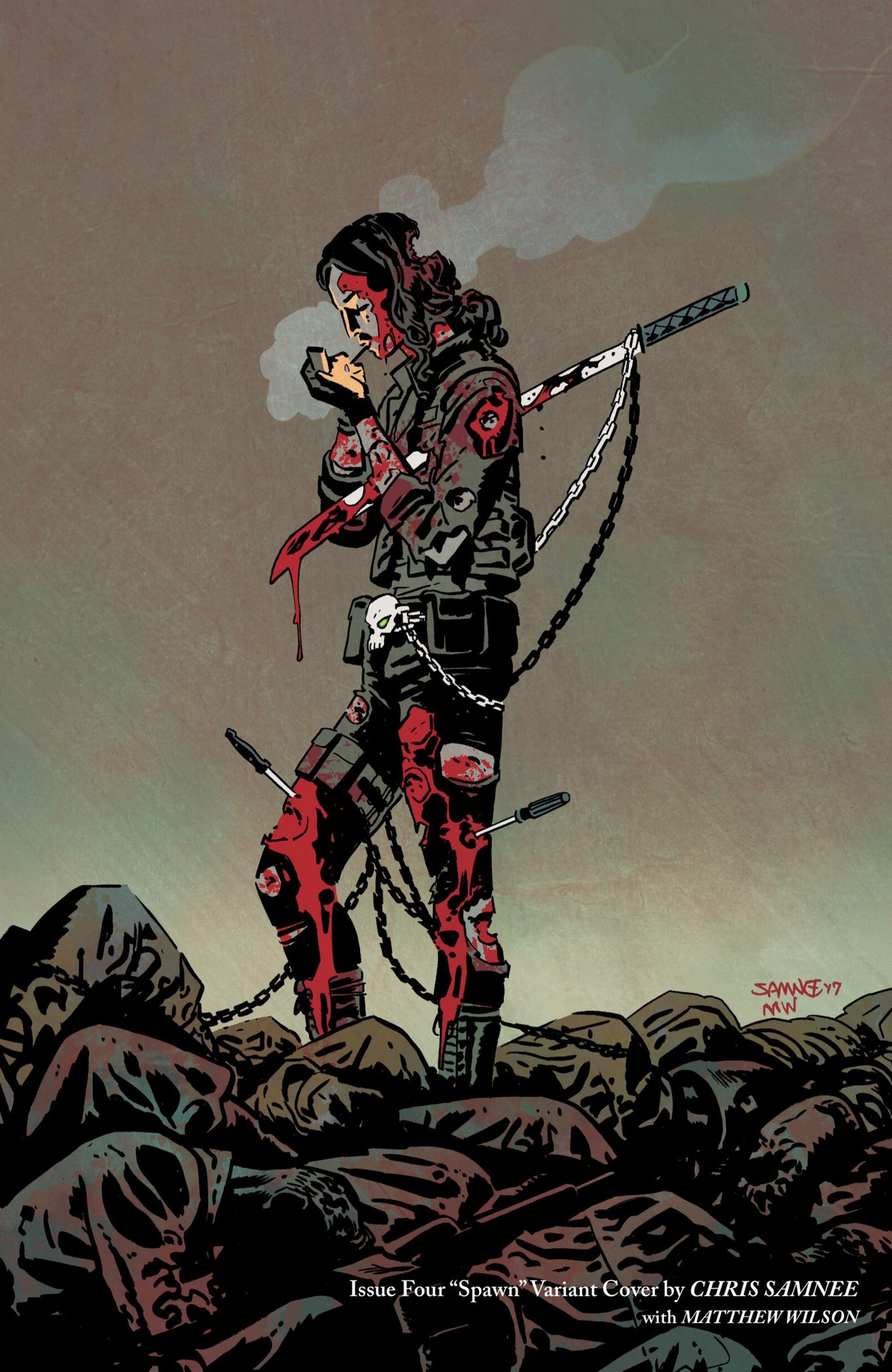
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